EDITED BY

JACOB KLEIN

NATHAN POWERS



The Oxford Handbook *of* HELLENISTIC PHILOSOPHY

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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For Gail Fine and Terry Irwin.
In memoriam John Cooper, 1939–2022.

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Finally, we note that the names of authors of coauthored chapters in this volume have been listed alphabetically. Likewise, the volume's editors appear on the cover in alphabetical order; both contributed equally.

Contributors

Keimpe Algra is Professor of Ancient Philosophy and Science at Utrecht University.

James Allen is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *Inference from Signs: Ancient Debates about the Nature of Evidence* (2001), and of articles on aspects of ancient skepticism, Stoicism, Aristotelian and pre-Stoic logic and dialectic, ancient ethical theory, and medicine. He is also the coeditor of *Essays in Honour of Michael Frede* (2011).

Elizabeth Asmis is Professor of Classics at the University of Chicago. She has worked on ancient Greek and Roman philosophy from the Presocratics to the Neoplatonists, with a focus on Epicureanism and Stoicism. In *Epicurus' Scientific Method* (1984), she argued that Epicurus developed a uniquely empirical method for showing that the universe is composed of atoms and void. She has studied the development of a science of aesthetics within ancient philosophy. She has also written on Cicero's political philosophy, as well as on Lucretius's attempt to convert the Romans. In recent years, she has focused on Epicurus's social philosophy.

Richard Bett is Professor of Philosophy and Classics at Johns Hopkins University. He has focused especially on the ancient Greek and Roman skeptics but has also published papers on the Stoics, the Sophists, Socrates, Plato, and Nietzsche. He is the author of *Pyrrho, His Antecedents, and His Legacy* (Oxford, 2000) and of four volumes of translation (with notes or commentary) of works by Sextus Empiricus. A collection of previously published essays appeared in 2019 (*How to Be a Pyrrhonist*, Cambridge). He also published *How to Keep an Open Mind*, selections from Sextus Empiricus for a general audience (Princeton, 2021).

Luca Castagnoli is Stavros Niarchos Foundation Clarendon Associate Professor in Ancient Greek Philosophy at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Oriel College. He is the author of *Ancient Self-Refutation* (Cambridge, 2010) and the coeditor of *Greek Memories: Theories and Practices* (Cambridge, 2019) and *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Logic* (Cambridge, 2023).

Victor Caston is Professor of Philosophy and Classical Studies at the University of Michigan. He specializes in ancient philosophy of mind and metaphysics, especially in Aristotle and the Stoics. He is currently working on a monograph titled *The Stoics on Mental Representation and Content* and has published papers on Aristotle's theory of perception, representation, and consciousness, as well as on emergentism and

epiphenomenalism in the Aristotelian tradition. His previous work includes a translation of the first half of Alexander of Aphrodisias's *On the Soul* with commentary (the second half is in progress). He was an editor of *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* between 2016 and 2022.

Paolo Crivelli is Professor of Ancient Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy of the University of Geneva. His research focuses on ancient logic and ontology. He has published a monograph on Aristotle's conception of truth, one on the account of falsehood in Plato's *Sophist*, and several articles on Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics.

Stewart Duncan is Professor of Philosophy at the University at Buffalo. His research focuses on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European philosophy. He is the author of *Materialism from Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford University Press, 2022), and of papers on philosophers including Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz, Toland, Cavendish, Cudworth, and Hume.

Jeffrey Fish is Associate Professor of Classics at Baylor University, specializing in literary papyrology. Among other projects, he is currently editing Philodemus's *On the Good King According to Homer*. He has published several articles on the Herculaneum papyri and their relevance to the broader classical tradition, and is a coeditor of *Vergil, Philodemus, and the Augustans* (University of Texas Press, 2004) and (with Kirk R. Sanders) of *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition* (Cambridge, 2011).

Katerina Ierodiakonou is Professor of Ancient Philosophy at the University of Athens and Associate Professor of Ancient Philosophy at the University of Geneva. She has published extensively on ancient and Byzantine philosophy, especially in the areas of epistemology and logic. She is currently working on a monograph about ancient theories of color from Empedocles to Galen, as well as on an edition, translation, and commentary of Theophrastus's *De sensibus* and of Michael Psellos's paraphrase of Aristotle's *De interpretatione*. She is also responsible for the preparation and publication of *A Sourcebook of Byzantine Philosophy*.

Brad Inwood is William Lampson Professor of Philosophy and Classics at Yale University. He has research interests in many areas of ancient philosophy, especially the Presocratics and Stoicism. His major works include *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (1985), *The Poem of Empedocles* (1992, 2001), *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome* (2005), *Seneca: Selected Philosophical Letters* (2007), *Ethics After Aristotle* (2014), *Stoicism: A Very Short Introduction* (2018), and *Later Stoicism: 155 BC to 200 AD: An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation* (2022). He is also the author of numerous translations of ancient philosophical texts.

Terence Irwin is Professor Emeritus of Ancient Philosophy at the University of Oxford. He is the author of *Plato's Gorgias* (translation and notes, 1979); *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (translation and notes, 3rd ed., 2019); *Aristotle's First Principles* (1988); *Classical Thought* (1989); *Plato's Ethics* (1995); *The Development of Ethics*, 3 vols. (2007–2009); *Virtù e obbligo morale* (2018); and *Ethics Through History* (2020). He is currently working

on a commentary (with text and translation) on Aristotle's three ethical works. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a Fellow of the British Academy.

Rachana Kamtekar is Professor of Philosophy and Classics at Cornell University. Since publishing her book *Plato's Moral Psychology: Intellectualism, the Divided Soul, and the Desire for Good* (Oxford University Press, 2017), she has been working on causation in antiquity. In 2022, she published "Experience and Preconception in Epicurus' Refutation of Determinism" (in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*) and (with Shaun Nichols) "Two Concepts of Cause in Antiphon's *Second Tetralogy*" (in *Phronesis*).

Jacob Klein is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Colgate University. His research focuses on ancient ethics and moral psychology, especially in the Hellenistic period. He has been a Fulbright research fellow at the Humboldt University in Berlin and a Visiting Nelson Endowed Professor at the University of Michigan.

Antonia LoLordo is George F. and Clare C. Downing Memorial Professor of Philosophy at the University of Virginia. She is the author of *Mary Shepherd* (Cambridge, 2022), *Locke's Moral Man* (Oxford, 2012), *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2007), and numerous papers on early modern philosophy. She is the editor of Mary Shepherd's *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe* (Oxford, 2020) and *Persons* (Oxford, 2019), and a founding editor of the *Journal of Modern Philosophy*.

A. A. Long is Chancellor's Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Classics, Irving G. Stone Professor Emeritus of Literature, and Affiliated Professor of Rhetoric and Philosophy, at the University of California, Berkeley. He is interested in all periods of ancient Greek philosophy, and especially the Hellenistic epoch. His books include *Hellenistic Philosophy* (London 1976/1988), (with D. N. Sedley) *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1987), *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge, 1999), *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (Oxford, 2006), *Greek Models of Mind and Self* (Harvard, 2015), and, most recently, *Selfhood & Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Potinus* (Oxford, 2022).

Anton M. Matytsin is Associate Professor of History at the University of Florida. After completing his PhD at the University of Pennsylvania in 2013, he was Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at Stanford University (2013–2015), Assistant Professor of History at Kenyon College (2015–2019), and Fellow at the National Humanities Center (2018–2019). He is the author of *The Specter of Skepticism in the Age of Enlightenment* (2016), and coeditor (with Dan Edelstein) of *Let There Be Enlightenment: The Religious and Mystical Sources of Rationality* (2018) and (with Jeffrey D. Burson) of *The Skeptical Enlightenment: Doubt and Certainty in the Age of Reason* (2019).

Susan Sauvé Meyer is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania and specializes in Classical Greek and Hellenistic philosophy with emphasis on the ethical

tradition. Her publications include *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility* (1993; reissued 2011), *Ancient Ethics* (2008), and *Plato: Laws 1 and 2* (2015). Her most recent book, *How to Flourish: An Ancient Guide to a Happy Life* (2023), is an abridged translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, aimed at a general readership. Her open-access online courses, "Plato and His Predecessors" and "Aristotle and His Successors" on Coursera, have enrolled more than 175,000 students since 2015.

Phillip Mitsis is A. S. Onassis Professor of Hellenic Culture and Civilization at New York University and Academic Director of the American Institute for Verdi Studies. His primary research interests are in Hellenistic philosophy, its influence on subsequent periods of philosophy, and ancient Greek and Roman epic. Recent publications include *The Oxford Handbook of Epicurus and Epicureanism*, (editor, Oxford University Press, 2020) and *Natura Aut Voluntas: Recherches sur la pensée politique et éthique hellénistique et romaine et son influence* (Brepols, 2020).

Tim O'Keefe is Professor of Philosophy at Georgia State University. Ancient ethics and ancient views on freedom and determinism are two of his main interests. He is the author of the books *Epicurus on Freedom* and *Epicureanism* and has published papers on the Epicureans' views on the mind–body relation, freedom of action, the ontological status of sensible qualities, friendship, justice, and death, as well as on other philosophers, such as the Cyrenaics, Stoics, Pyrrhonian skeptics, and Anaxarchus.

Nathan Powers is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany. His research is centered on ancient Greek and Roman natural philosophy and epistemology, with a special focus on the Hellenistic period. He received a PhD in Classics from Princeton University and has held a Whiting Foundation Honorific Fellowship in the Humanities and a Senior Research Fellowship at the Humboldt University in Berlin. His work has appeared in venues such as the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* and *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*.

Ricardo Salles is a researcher at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and was recently a Visiting Fellow and Scholar at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. His recent work has concentrated on ancient physics and metaphysics. His latest publications include the edited volume *Biology and Cosmology in Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), "Two Classic Problems in the Stoic Theory of Time" in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy 55* (2018), and "The Stoic Cosmic Soul and the Theory of Seminal Principles" in J. Wilberding's (editor) *The World-Soul: The History of a Concept* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

Kirk R. Sanders is Associate Professor of Philosophy and the Classics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research interests range across ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, from the Presocratics to the schools of the Hellenistic period. He has published widely on the Epicurean tradition in particular, with special emphasis on figures from the first century BCE and works partially preserved among the Herculaneum papyri.

Whitney Schwab is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, focusing on ancient epistemology and metaphysics. His work has appeared in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, *Phronesis*, and *Apeiron*. He is currently working on a monograph on the evolution of Greek epistemology from Plato through Aristotle to the Stoics.

David Sedley retired as Laurence Professor of Ancient Philosophy at the University of Cambridge in 2014. His books include *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (1987; with A. A. Long); *Plato's Cratylus* (2003); *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus* (2004); and *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity* (2007). He has also for fifty years been editing fragments of Greek philosophy preserved on papyrus.

John Sellars is Reader in the History of Philosophy at Royal Holloway, University of London. His work to date has focused on Stoicism and its later influence. His books include *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy* (2003; 2nd ed. 2009), *Stoicism* (2006), *Hellenistic Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2018), and *Marcus Aurelius* (2021). He is the editor of *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition* (2016), charting the influence of Stoic ideas from antiquity to the present day. He recently coauthored *Barlaam of Seminara on Stoic Ethics* (2022).

Christopher Taylor was a Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy at Corpus Christi College, Oxford until his retirement in 2003. His principal publications are *Plato, Protagoras* (translated with notes, Oxford, 1976; revised ed. 1996); *The Greeks on Pleasure* (with J. C. B. Gosling, Oxford, 1982); *Routledge History of Philosophy*, vol. 1: *From the Beginning to Plato* (editor, London, 1998); *Socrates* (Oxford, 1998; revised ed. 2000); *The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus,* Fragments. *A Text and Translation with a Commentary* (Toronto, 1999); *Aristotle*, Nicomachean Ethics, *Books II–IV. Translated with a Commentary* (Oxford 2006); *Pleasure, Mind, and Soul: Selected Papers in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, 2008); and a translation from Russian of S. Luria, *Demokrit* (Leningrad, 1960, trans. 2016).

Georgia Tsouni is Associate Professor in Classics at the University of Crete. Her research interests center on Hellenistic and Roman philosophy and literature, with a particular focus on ethics, political philosophy, the history of the Academy, and the reception of Greek philosophy in Rome (especially Cicero's philosophical dialogues). She has published the monograph *Antiochus and Peripatetic Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); a new critical edition and English translation of "The Epitome of Peripatetic Ethics" in *Arius Didymus on Peripatetic Ethics, Household Management, and Politics* (ed. W. Fortenbaugh, Routledge, 2018); and numerous articles on the Hellenistic Academy, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Cicero.

Francesco Verde is Associate Professor of the History of Ancient Philosophy at the Department of Philosophy of Sapienza University of Rome. His research interests include Epicurus, the ancient Epicurean tradition, and the school of Aristotle in the Hellenistic period. Among his recent publications are a commentary on Epicurus's

Letter to Pythocles, with contributions by D. De Sanctis, F. G. Masi, and M. Tulli (Nomos Verlag, 2022); and *Peripatetic Philosophy in Context: Knowledge, Time, and Soul from Theophrastus to Cratippus* (De Gruyter, 2022). He is currently working on a commentary on Cicero's *Academici libri*.

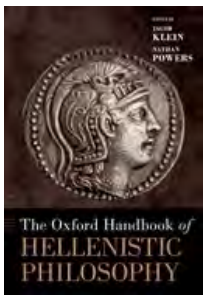
James Warren is Professor of Ancient Philosophy at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Corpus Christi College. His publications include *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archaeology of Ataraxia* (2002), *Facing Death: Epicurus and his Critics* (2004), *Presocratics* (2007), *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists* (2014), and *Regret: A Study in Ancient Moral Psychology* (2021).

Stephen White is Professor of Classics and Philosophy at the University of Texas. His publications include a translation of *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (2021); studies and editions of Hellenistic Aristotelians, including coedited volumes on *Clearchus of Soli* (2022), *Aristo of Ceos* (2006), and *Lyco of Troas and Hieronymus of Rhodes* (2004); and *Sovereign Virtue: Aristotle on the Relation between Happiness and Prosperity* (1992).

J. P. F. Wynne is Associate Professor of Classics in the Department of World Languages and Cultures at the University of Utah. He is a scholar of Hellenistic and later ancient Greco–Roman thought. To date, his writing has focused on Cicero's philosophical works, for example in the book *Cicero on the Philosophy of Religion* (2019).

PART I

PHILOSOPHY IN THE HELLENISTIC AGE



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CHAPTER

Introduction: Scope and Themes of Hellenistic Philosophy

Jacob Klein, Nathan Powers

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Abstract

This chapter places Hellenistic philosophy in its broader historical context and surveys the major philosophical themes and debates of the period. The conquests of Alexander the Great greatly enlarged the boundaries of the Greek world, leading to the establishment of new centers of Greek culture and learning across the eastern Mediterranean basin and Middle East. Yet despite its expanding horizons, Greek philosophical activity remained largely centered in Athens throughout the third and second centuries BCE, when Epicureanism, Stoicism, and the skepticism of the "new" Platonic Academy achieved a special prominence as "schools" (*scholai*) engaging one another in vigorous debate. After some discussion of each of these movements and their interactions, a detailed chapter-by-chapter summary of the volume is offered, along with a brief bibliography of select general works on Hellenistic philosophy.

Keywords: Greece, Hellenistic, Alexander of Macedon, Athens, Epicureanism, Stoicism, skepticism, Academy

Subject: Classical Philosophy, Philosophy

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1. Greek Philosophy in the Hellenistic Period

Historians since the middle of the nineteenth century have applied the label “Hellenistic” to the period following the death (in 323 BCE) of the Macedonian king Alexander “the Great,” whose rapid campaign of conquest reshaped a broad swath of the ancient world, causing the eastern boundaries of Greek influence and culture to expand immeasurably.[1] The vast empire Alexander had cobbled together with spear and siege engine quickly fragmented, as generals and top aides formerly in his service scrambled to seize authority for themselves in its various parts, leading to the establishment of new Greco-Macedonian kingdoms. These new principalities drew in dense waves of Greek settlers, mercenaries, merchants, and administrators—not only throughout Asia Minor, Egypt, and the Levant, but also across the ancient fertile heartlands of the Middle East and well beyond into the mountain fastnesses of what are now Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and Kashmir.

As Greeks joined communities or founded new ones in these distant regions, they brought with them their language and traditions of education, creating new centers of learning and culture where conditions were favorable. Though Greek migration to Central Asia eventually faltered, a widespread and enduring Greek presence was established across the eastern Mediterranean basin and the Middle East. Greek long remained the lingua franca of government in these parts of the world; commerce was conducted through coins stamped with Greek script; and worship frequently involved a blend of Greek civic cult practices with local religions.[2] Major new centers of Greek patronage and learning included Pergamon, Antioch, and Smyrna—and most
p. 4 importantly of all, the court of the Ptolemies at Alexandria in Egypt. In Alexandria much of ↳ the period’s finest literature was composed, momentous scientific advancements were made, and the institutionalized practice of scholarship developed as librarians began systematically to catalog and comment on earlier Greek texts.[3]

Greek philosophy was an integral part of this cultural expansion, and in the wake of Alexander’s conquests it addressed itself to a much broader constituency, attracting numerous diverse practitioners from across the newly enlarged Greek world. But despite the far-reaching effects of Alexander’s campaigns and the importance of new centers of research and scholarship such as Alexandria, until quite late in the Hellenistic period the most important developments in Greek philosophy occurred mainly in the city of Athens, and leading philosophical trends played out at the institutions established there. Talented persons with a passion for philosophy tended to gravitate toward Athens to affiliate themselves, temporarily or long-term, with one or another of the schools headquartered in the city, and they often remained there, despite the occasional efforts of powerful patrons to attract them elsewhere.[4] Although Athens was not the only locus of philosophical activity, it was the dominant hub of that activity, “the great melting pot of Greek philosophy.”[5]

In the third and second centuries BCE, moreover, three major new movements in Athens—the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the “new” Academics—achieved a special prominence, and their competing visions came for a time to dominate the landscape of Greek philosophy. Though “Hellenistic philosophy” could refer at its broadest to the patchwork of philosophical activity across the entirety of the Greek world from Alexander’s death to the period’s conventional end date of 31 BCE, our organizing aim in preparing this volume has been to present a picture of these leading philosophical movements during the height of their influence.[6] This occurred from roughly 300 to 100 BCE, when these schools remained centered in Athens and when their engagement with one another there resulted in impressive philosophical innovations. The positions staked out and elaborated by Epicureans and Stoics in this period and the sophisticated controversies in which they engaged, with one another and with the skeptical Academy, reverberated through the subsequent history of philosophy, setting the terms for many central debates of the early modern period. They remain of great philosophical interest in their own right today.

The remaining sections of this introduction first characterize the rise of the new movements and the institutions associated with them in Hellenistic Athens (§2); then offer a brief overview of some of the central

philosophical themes of the era (§3); and finally provide summaries of the volume's chapters (§4), together with a list of abbreviations used in this volume and a bibliography of some recent general work in the field (§5–6).

2. The New Schools at Athens

Athens at the close of the fourth century BCE provided an extraordinarily rich environment for philosophical inquiry and dialogue. It had a prestigious history as a beacon of Greek civilization in general and a particularly
p. 5 strong philosophical heritage as the ↳ city of Socrates (d. 399 BCE), whose life and death set an authoritative and inspirational example of philosophical inquiry and self-mastery. In the decades following Socrates's trial and execution, Socratic philosophy was taken up and developed first within the Academy (founded by Socrates's student Plato) and then within the Lyceum (founded by Plato's student Aristotle), and both institutions remained important centers of philosophical activity. Plato's immediate successors maintained the traditions of the Academy, attracting students to its physical location outside the city walls. Following Aristotle's death, members of the Lyceum, located on the other side of the city, appear to have been engaged for the most part in more specialized pursuits, frequently developing particular lines of inquiry inaugurated by Aristotle.

Other important movements likewise sought to continue Socrates's legacy in various and sometimes surprising ways.[7] The iconoclasts and moralists eventually known as Cynics were highly visible at Athens, advocating a lifestyle sharply at odds with convention and living with conspicuous indifference to reputation and wealth. The Cyrenaics, established in Northern Africa but with a presence in Athens, combined a sensualist form of hedonism with the epistemological view that experience itself is the only possible object of knowledge. The Megarians made notable innovations in dialectic and logic and explored metaphysical questions; of particular importance within this movement was a branch called the Dialectical school, whose most prominent figure, Diodorus Cronus (active in Athens and later Alexandria), made early advances in modal logic and the theory of conditionals. Because tradition associates their founding with various students of Socrates (the Cyrenaics with Aristippus of Cyrene, the Cynics with Antisthenes, and the Megarians with Eucleides of Megara), scholars sometime refer to these movements as the "minor Socratic" schools. But in the late fourth and early third centuries BCE their influence was not "minor," and the new schools in Athens engaged closely with their teachings and sometimes incorporated their views.

Another figure, standing outside the Socratic tradition, deserves special note for his prominent example and influence at this time. Pyrrho of Elis (c. 365–360 to 275–270 BCE), who had accompanied Alexander on his campaigns as far as India (there meeting gymnosophists or "naked philosophers," perhaps Brahmins), returned to Greece with a novel perspective that many philosophers found attractive. Though he led a quiet life thereafter in his hometown, his character and outlook were well known, thanks largely to the writings of his associate and admirer Timon of Phlius. Pyrrho refrained from making definite assertions about the world, and found that this refrainment led to a state of tranquility (*ataraxia*) that he recommended to others. Though there is reason to suspect that Pyrrho's outlook was not motivated by epistemological considerations, his principled refusal to make assertions was viewed by later Greek skeptics as an inspirational precursor to their own philosophical practice, and his ideal of tranquility proved widely influential in Hellenistic ethics among dogmatists and skeptics alike.[8]

The new Hellenistic movements at Athens were founded in this lively philosophical scene. Epicurus was born an Athenian citizen (on the colony island of Samos in the Aegean Sea) and began teaching in Athens around 305 BCE. Having purchased a house with a plot of land outside the city's Dipylon gate, not far from the
p. 6 Academy, he established ↳ a school called the Garden (*Kêpos*) there.[9] The Garden quickly became a rival to the Academy and Lyceum, and there is evidence of early Epicurean engagement with both (as well as with the "minor" Socratic movements).[10] Zeno hailed from Citium on Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean, a

community that historically was ethnically Phoenician (as indeed Zeno himself is likely to have been) rather than Greek. After an impressive course of studies at Athens with the leading figures of the time, Zeno began around 300 BCE to teach in a colonnade (*stoa*) in the Athenian *agora* or marketplace at the center of the city, where Socrates himself had famously engaged in philosophical conversations. From this locale, Zeno's associates, originally called Zenonians, eventually took the name "Stoics." In contrast to the Epicureans, who tended to present themselves as a proudly independent and self-reliant movement, Zeno's outlook openly incorporated various doctrines of the Socratic schools and was overtly shaped by the ethical theory of the Academy. Stoicism presented itself from the beginning as a continuation of the Socratic tradition.

A further development sometime around 265 BCE had a profound and far-reaching impact. The Academy that had been founded by Plato and continued by his successors was revitalized at this time under the headship of Arcesilaus, who adopted a skeptical outlook modeled on the Socratic method of Plato's early dialogues, in which Socrates subjects the beliefs of his conversation partners to intense scrutiny while disavowing knowledge himself. Under the headship of Arcesilaus, the "new" Academy practiced a sophisticated method of dialectic that provided a persistent foil for the positive doctrines of the Epicureans and Stoics. This practice, and the ingenuity with which the Academics developed it, gave rise to a powerful tradition of skepticism on which early modern philosophy eventually drew.

By the middle of the third century BCE, Epicureanism and Stoicism had emerged as vibrant philosophical movements embodied in formal institutions, in a manner similar to the Platonic Academy and Aristotelian Lyceum. Though these institutions were called "schools" (*diatribai* or *scholai*), it should not be assumed that they were schools in the modern sense of the term. Relatively little is known about their organization, finances, or day-to-day operations. Crucially, however, they anchored their intellectual movements in a particular place that served as a venue for research and education. They provided a record-keeping function, and their continuity over time was maintained by a succession of official leaders (scholarchs). To be an Epicurean or a Stoic in this period was not simply to profess or defend certain views or to adopt a certain outlook; it was also to have some relationship with the leadership and faculty of an Athenian school. And the schools of Athens in turn provided an institutional infrastructure through which the city retained and consolidated its status as the de facto capital of Greek philosophy during the third and second centuries BCE.[11]

3. Themes and Debates

In the stimulating environment of Hellenistic Athens, philosophy developed along distinctive lines,
p. 7 characterized first and foremost by intensive dialogue and debate among ↳ the schools. We may identify three main factors in this development. First, as neighboring institutions, the Academy, Garden, and Stoa competed for the attention and allegiance of a common audience of prospective students, and their rivalry fostered a highly competitive philosophical scene. Second, and more substantively, the Epicureans and the Stoics were (as we shall see) at odds with one another in many of their fundamental commitments, and hence predisposed to express sharp disagreement with each other. And third was the special role played by the skeptical Academy, which, from the time of Arcesilaus through the late second century BCE, turned away from its traditional project of developing Plato's doctrines and instead devoted itself to sophisticated dialectical refutations, based on premises that their opponents could accept, of dogmatic philosophical views. This practice frequently elicited responses from their opponents, which would then receive further Academic refutation, and so on in a cycle of critical dialogue. The Academy's modus operandi thus had the effect of catalyzing philosophical debate and generating controversies that otherwise might not have arisen. The sophistication and skill with which the schools engaged one another and, in many cases, the refinement of doctrine to which their debates led, are clearly reflected in our sources for this period.[12]

Only the Lyceum stood largely apart from these exchanges. Aristotelianism has usually been described by modern scholars as being in decline during these two centuries, at least after the end of the leadership of Aristotle's immediate successor Theophrastus. It is perhaps equally fair to say that the school's members in this period tended to direct their efforts to more particular scientific or technical fields of inquiry, even as philosophy as such was becoming increasingly demarcated from those fields.[13] Relatedly, it was in this period that the canonical division of the philosophical curriculum into three parts became well established: physics (including metaphysics and natural philosophy), logic (including epistemology and dialectic), and the study of ethics.

This division was broadly adopted by Epicureans and Stoics alike as a framework within which the two schools developed comprehensive and sharply competing philosophical systems. These were set out in treatises reflecting each school's doctrinal commitments, covering a wide range of topics, from the physical constituents of the cosmos to questions of politics and ethics. The following summary provides a capsule overview of some of the overarching philosophical doctrines of the period, noting points at which the schools agreed with one another or engaged in significant controversy.

Both Epicureans and Stoics take the physical world to comprise all beings; to this extent, both movements are committed to naturalism. This commitment differentiates them sharply from Plato and Aristotle and pervasively shapes their philosophical systems. At the same time, the schools articulate two very different visions of naturalism. The Epicureans, building upon an earlier tradition of Greek atomism, are recognizable to us as *materialists*. They take the ultimate constituents of all physical objects to be tiny solid bodies (atoms), and they take atoms to possess intrinsically only a few basic physical properties (such as size and shape); all other qualities or attributes possessed by physical objects supervene on those basic properties in virtue of the way
p. 8 atoms are aggregated into larger compound bodies. The Stoics likewise think that ↳ fundamentally only bodies exist, but they ascribe to bodies a much wider range of intrinsic properties, such that a body can count (for example) as a living and thinking thing in its own right. For this reason, the Stoics are now often labeled *corporealists*, precisely to distinguish their view from the sort of reductive materialism we find in Epicureanism.

Both Epicureans and Stoics insist that only bodies have causal influence in the world, and both take the course of events in the world to be comprehensively determined by the interactions of bodies. The schools' rival naturalisms thus both raise the specter of *causal determinism*, with the attendant challenge of showing how there can be moral responsibility for one's own actions in a world where an exclusively physical story can be told about every event. Their strategies for addressing this challenge are radically different. Epicureans allow for the occasional occurrence of uncaused motions, and so maintain that their physical theory, being not strictly causally deterministic after all, poses no real threat to moral responsibility, while the Stoics defend the view that causal determinism is in fact compatible with moral responsibility. Both approaches meet stiff resistance from the Academics.

Epicureans and Stoics are committed to a thoroughgoing *empiricism* as well. Both schools hold that cognition in mature human beings depends on empirically acquired "preconceptions." These preconceptions are modifications of the mind brought about by its repeated reception of a large number of similar sense-impressions; the possession of these modifications allows humans to entertain and articulate claims about the world in general or universal terms.

The Stoics furthermore subscribe to a novel form of epistemological *foundationalism*, according to which there is a special class of impressions that are both true and self-warranting. Human knowledge depends on the mind's endorsement of these "cognitive impressions," which represent the world (conveying that such-and-such is the case) in so clear and distinct a manner that they carry their own justification with them: we cannot be wrong to accept their content. This view casts a very long shadow because of the way in which the Academics respond to it: an important part of their engagement with the Stoics is focused squarely on the question of whether there can be such impressions. If there cannot be, then all knowledge—on the Stoic

account—is impossible. In criticizing the Stoic "cognitive impression" (and resisting Stoic counterattacks), the Academics develop an arsenal of skeptical arguments that get taken up again in the early modern period and still remain of vital concern to epistemology. This arsenal is extended by a radical offshoot of the Hellenistic Academy, the so-called Pyrrhonian skeptics.

The Epicureans eschew formal logic as a way of organizing and extending knowledge, but they nevertheless develop sophisticated informal rules of inference for testing new claims against accepted beliefs. For example, they distinguish between epistemic circumstances in which it is appropriate for an inquirer to insist that new claims be supported by existing empirical evidence, and circumstances in which it is appropriate instead to
p. 9 hold new claims to the standard of not conflicting with existing evidence. ↳ The Stoics, by contrast, develop a robust logical system to rival (and in some respects surpass) Aristotle's. This system remains of great interest, in particular because it anticipates many features of modern propositional logic. (Indeed, the resemblance may not be wholly accidental: a recent study argues that Frege's logic is directly influenced by Stoicism.)[14]

Epicureans and Stoics alike offer an account of the best form of human life and a technique for achieving it. Like Aristotle, they frame this account in terms of *eudaimonia*—human happiness or well-being. Though they conceive of human happiness in sharply differing terms, both schools agree that it is to be achieved through a development of the self, and the relevant understanding of the self is integrated, in both systems, within a comprehensive and systematic account of nature as whole. For the Epicureans, this primarily means the adaptation of desire and the elimination of fear as means to achieving tranquility (*ataraxia*); both aims are to be accomplished, in their view, through a correct understanding of the physical nature of the cosmos. Though they regard the traditional virtues as necessary for happiness, they treat them as a strictly instrumental means to happiness, valuable only for the results they secure. The Stoics, in stark contrast, regard virtue and virtuous activity as wholly constitutive of happiness and indeed as the only good. Virtue as they conceive it is a condition of true, secure, and comprehensive cognition, requiring an understanding of the cosmic order and of humankind's place within it. This understanding leads to a life of unobstructed virtuous activity, in harmony with nature and free of disturbance.

Both schools, therefore, place a high premium on a correct understanding of nature as essential to achieving the human good. Both also speak of the agent who possesses this understanding (and lives in accord with it) as the wise person or *sophos*, the ideal embodiment of their philosophies; yet the competing visions of the cosmos worked out by Stoics and Epicureans lead to strikingly different conclusions about the nature of the human good and virtue's role in achieving it. Though the skeptical Academy accepted no positive doctrines, an ethical ideal, emphasizing the supremacy of reason, is nonetheless implicit in their dialectical method. Eventually the Pyrrhonists came to pursue tranquility (*ataraxia*) as the outcome of their own skeptical practice.

From the founding of the new schools at the outset of the third century BCE, these and other views were the subject of fierce dialogue and debate. There are indications, however, that by late in the second century the tenor of philosophy began to change. The debates between the formidable dialectician Carneades (214–129/8 BCE) and the bookish Antipater of Tarsus (d. 130/129 BCE) are the last controversy between Stoics and Academics for which we have a significant record. There is evidence of renewed interest in Aristotle at this time, as well as of a shift away from debate and innovation to commentary and consolidation as the leading philosophical activities. By the time the Hellenistic period (as conventionally characterized by historians) was over in the late first century BCE, the distinctive features of the Athenian scene described above had eroded, and Greek philosophy had already shifted to a new footing.[15]

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4. Organization and Chapter Summaries

The scope and organization of this volume reflect two main considerations. First, for reasons described above, it primarily discusses the philosophy of the Stoics and Epicureans and the Academic response to them, concentrating primarily on the two centuries (roughly 300–100 BCE) during which all three movements were headquartered together in Athens and engaged there in intense and productive dialectic with one another. Second, we have prioritized presenting the Hellenistic schools as *systems* of thought: and so rather than organizing the volume primarily around topics (as, for example, *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* does), we have chosen to organize it primarily around the schools themselves, to give a picture of each of them in the round.[16]

The introductory section of this volume continues with chapters surveying the main philosophers of the period and our sources of information about Hellenistic philosophy. The three sections that follow each cover one of the major Hellenistic schools (the Garden, the Stoa, and the skeptical Academy), presenting the views developed and defended within that school over these crucial two centuries. Each of these sections also includes a chapter considering the school's fortunes in the first century BCE, when Greek philosophy lost its center of gravity in Athens and became more dispersed; the section on the Academics also discusses an important offshoot of the late-Hellenistic Academy, the movement that came to be called "Pyrrhonian" skepticism. The volume's final section comprises chapters discussing the reception of ancient Epicureanism, Stoicism, and skepticism in the early modern period, when a fresh engagement with Hellenistic philosophy profoundly influenced the shape and course of European philosophy.

4.1. Philosophy in the Hellenistic Age

In "The Cast of Characters: Major Figures of Hellenistic Philosophy," **A. A. Long** discusses the philosophically rich environment of Hellenistic Athens and provides a selective overview of the leading practitioners of philosophy throughout the period, with attention to their main contributions and legacies. Though focused on the founders and scholarchs of the major schools, particularly through the second half of the second century BCE, Long also surveys the minor Socratics, together with figures of unique or emblematic significance for the period. Here, Pyrrho of Elis—a "quasi-skeptical guru at the beginning of the epoch," who lent his name to the later skepticism of Aenesidemus—has special prominence as an influential precursor to new trends of the time.[17] So too the Stoic Aristo of Chios, though not a scholarch in his own right, was one of the most respected
p. 11 philosophers of his day and an important foil for Zeno and Arcesilaus. Long's ↳ overview gives a lively sense of the forceful and often colorful philosophical personalities of the time, together with the context in which they lectured, debated, and wrote.

Since the vast majority of the original writings by these figures have vanished, the evidence on which our knowledge of Hellenistic philosophy depends is largely found in reports by later authors. In "Our Sources for Hellenistic Philosophy," **Stephen White** conveys the enormity of what has been lost and the complex story of the lines of transmission by which the evidence that survives has come down to us. After providing an overview of original Greek sources that are known to us on the basis of later catalogs—amounting to a staggering 600 titles by leading figures alone—White distinguishes four chronological stages in the ancient transmission and reception of the ideas contained in these original texts: (1) their rendering in Latin in the first century BCE at the hands of Lucretius and Cicero, (2) their elaboration and expanding influence into the second century CE, (3) their scholarly consolidation around 200 CE, and (4) their final subordination to Platonism and Christianity. White emphasizes the various and sometimes subtle ways in which the "content, form, and affiliation" of sources from each stage shape (and potentially distort) our evidence for Hellenistic philosophy. He turns finally to the modern sourcebooks in which this complicated array of evidence is made available to contemporary readers.

4.2. The Garden

The Epicurean Garden, so called after the cultivated estate where Epicurus's friends and associates gathered outside the walls of Athens, was the first of the new Hellenistic schools to be founded. The Garden stood largely apart from the Socratic tradition on which the Academy, Lyceum, and Stoa drew. Its roots were rather in the doctrines of the Presocratic Ionian philosophers, especially the materialist Democritean philosophy which Epicurus had absorbed in Asia Minor prior to his arrival in Athens. Though it became standard during the period to divide philosophy into physics, logic (including what we call epistemology), and ethics, instead of logic the Epicureans preferred to speak of "canonic"—the division of philosophy dealing with the standards or criteria (*kanonika*) by which truth may be cognized.[18] Accordingly, Epicurean thought can be broadly divided into physical theory, comprising the principles of atomism; *kanonikê*, dealing with the criteria of truth and the foundations of knowledge; and ethics, in which the Epicureans were avowed hedonists, identifying pleasure as the sole good and virtue as a strictly instrumental means of achieving it.

Epicurean physical theory posits atomic bodies, and the void in which they are located and move, as the sole ultimate constituents of reality. **"The Principles of Epicurean Atomism" by Keimpe Algra** investigates the metaphysical commitments underpinning this austere materialism, distinguishing carefully between what Epicureans owe to the earlier (Democritean) phase of Greek atomism and what innovations they introduced, and offering suggestions about how the latter may represent responses to issues raised by Aristotle and
p. 12 Diodorus Cronus. Algra offers a fresh reconstruction of Epicurus's main ↳ argument for the existence of atomic bodies, and he argues persuasively that Epicurean "void" is in the first instance not what we would call *empty* space but rather space as such, i.e., an extension which is either occupied (filled) by a body or empty.

In "Order without Teleology: Epicurean Cosmogony, Theology, and Anthropology," **Francesco Verde** explores a number of central topics in Epicurean physics, including the formation of our cosmos, the nature of the gods, celestial phenomena, soul (*psuchê*) as the principle of animal life in general (and humans in particular), and the original development of human society (with a focus on the invention of language). He focuses on the Epicureans' appeal to purely materialistic first principles in accounting for the origin and perpetuation of complex and regular patterns throughout the natural world.

Epicurean epistemology or canonic (*kanokikê*) characterizes perceptual appearances (*phantasiai*), preconceptions (*prolêpseis*), and feelings (*pathê*) as criteria of truth, and it is a central and striking claim of Epicurean theory that all perceptual appearances *are true*. In "Canonic: The Epicurean Theory of Knowledge," **Christopher Taylor** argues that this fundamental thesis is best understood as a robust claim about correspondence: there is an "exact fit between the properties represented in experience and the properties of the *eidôla* causing those experiences."[19] Though Epicurus seems to have intended some version of this claim for each of the sensory modalities, it appears to fit only the details of visual experience, as Taylor observes. Epicurus also appeals to preconceptions (*prolêpseis*) and feelings (*pathê*) as further criteria of truth. Preconceptions are characterized as the basic contents of thought, representations built up from appearances, stored by the operation of memory and activated by language. Feelings, finally, are the criterion by which we recognize pleasure as good and pain as bad, providing a basis both for practical choice and ethical theorizing.

Though Epicurus held that all physical phenomena are without exception the result of atomic motions and collisions, he also insisted that human actions are not constrained or compelled, so that humans bear responsibility for them. **James Warren** in "Epicurus on Freedom and Responsibility" considers how Epicurus accommodated these commitments notwithstanding the evident tension between them. Warren first discusses the notorious atomic "swerve" posited by Epicurus to avoid strict physical determinism. Then he turns to fascinating but difficult fragmentary evidence from Epicurus's *On Nature* that offers a developmental account of human psychology describing how we come to be responsible agents. Finally, Warren comments on the related Epicurean view that future-tensed propositions are not necessarily either true or false.

Given the almost total loss of primary sources for the period, it is notable that we have three letters by Epicurus's own hand, preserved in Diogenes Laertius's biography of Epicurus. In "Epicurus on Living Blessedly," **Phillip Mitsis** offers an interpretation of Epicurean ethics based especially on a close reading of the *Letter to Menoeceus*. Departing from the usual view according to which Epicurus identifies the human end with happiness (*eudaimonia*), Mitsis argues that happiness is but one element of living blessedly (*to makariôs zên*) as Epicurus understands it. Mitsis then develops an account of Epicurean hedonism that considers Epicurus's
p. 13 central distinction between empty ↳ (*kenos*) and natural (*phusikos*) desires, the claim that the *pathê* are themselves a criterion that justifies the identification of pleasure as the good, and the further distinction between static and non-static pleasures. On the resulting interpretation, the blessed life wholly consists in what Epicurus characterizes as static pleasures, while what he calls kinetic pleasures are mere phenomenal variations of these, of no consequence to blessedness itself. Epicurus's hedonism thus has a more objective character than has sometimes been supposed, bearing a resemblance to contemporary objective list theories, and differing markedly in this respect from the later hedonism of Bentham and Mill.

Fear is a central obstacle to the blessed life and the achievement of tranquility (*ataraxia*) as the Epicureans understand it. In "Achieving Tranquility: Epicurus on Living without Fear," **Tim O'Keefe** surveys the types of fear recognized by Epicurus as *empty*—a division that answers broadly to the category of empty desires—together with the strategies for their elimination. Empty fears are based on false beliefs, some of which are theoretical and some practical in nature, and Epicurean strategies for the elimination of these accordingly divide into two types. Critical examples of empty fears based on theoretical beliefs, and central targets of Epicurean therapy, are the fear of death in its various forms and fear of the gods. Against the first of these, the Epicureans argue that death is not a harm. To eliminate the second fear, Epicurus argues that the gods, being far removed from human affairs, are not a source of anything harmful to us. Epicurean theory makes room as well for practical wisdom, which eliminates the fear of privation both by teaching us to moderate our desires and by enabling us to satisfy desires that are natural and necessary.

The reconstruction of Epicurean views in any domain relies to a great extent on later sources. In "Living with Others: Epicureans on Justice and Pity," **Elizabeth Asmis** develops an account of Epicurean political theory based on a close reading of the relevant passages of Epicurus's *Principle Doctrines* and Book 5 of Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*. Focusing on the Epicurean theory of justice as a compact founded on self-interest, Asmis argues that, as developed by Lucretius, this theory nonetheless makes room for other-regarding concern in the form of pity. After examining Epicurus's own conception of justice, Asmis turns to Lucretius's story of the evolution of human communities, which distinguishes two stages of social development required for the establishment of justice; pity, which Asmis characterizes as a form of attachment that goes beyond mere self-concern, is crucial to the first of these stages. Though no evidence of an appeal to pity in Epicurus's own account of justice survives, Asmis argues that the Lucretian understanding is consistent with the evidence for Epicurus's original views of compacts and laws.

In this section's concluding chapter, "Roman Epicureanism of the First Century BCE," **Jeffrey Fish** and **Kirk R. Sanders** present a nuanced portrait of the growing influence of Epicurean philosophy in Roman society during the late Republic and early Empire. They argue (against the prevalent recent trend in scholarship) that Roman Epicureanism was to some degree a "popular" movement that enjoyed relatively widespread support. They further argue that Roman Epicureans of the governing class were not acting against the school's fundamental commitments (as has sometimes been claimed) by engaging in public life.

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4.3. The Stoa

In marked contrast to Epicurus, who developed doctrines largely independent of the Socratic tradition and tended to define his own philosophical outlook in opposition to that of rivals, the early Stoics conscientiously identified themselves with Socrates and his legacy. Around 300 BCE, Zeno of Citium, having studied with the leading philosophers in Athens, began to teach independently in a colonnade (the *Stoa Poikilê*) in the Athenian marketplace (*agora*), the city's beating heart. There he eventually gathered around himself a group of colleagues and associates who were first called "Zenonians" and then, because of their habitual meeting place, "men from the Stoa." Some of these early associates, such as Aristo of Chios, developed their own distinct positions, which were evidently regarded, at an early stage, as alternative forms of Stoicism. It was not until the consolidation of Stoic philosophy under Chrysippus that it became possible to speak of a definite Stoic orthodoxy that looked back to the original teachings of Zeno.[20] Under the headings of physics, logic, and ethics the Stoics developed positions that were sharply at odds with Epicurean theory: in physics, a continuum theory of matter; in logic, an ambitious program embracing theories of cognition, argument, rhetoric, and grammar; and in ethics, the stark position that virtue alone is good.

In "The Physics and Metaphysics of Stoic Corporealism," **Katerina Ierodiakonou** explores the Stoic commitment to a view foundational to the naturalistic outlook of the school: that reality consists (mainly) of bodies. Taking a fresh look at the ancient evidence, she argues that the active and passive principles that the Stoics take to be fundamental—god and matter—are each "bodily" just in the sense that they are three-dimensional. It is only other bodies ultimately constituted from these principles that possess further hallmarks of corporeality (such as, crucially, resistance). She also discusses several other topics of systematic importance to Stoic physics and metaphysics, including the theory of mixture, which describes how the active and passive principles are related in bodies that they constitute; the theory of incorporeals (including void, place, time, and "sayables"); and the so-called categories or primary genera of beings.

The Stoics maintain that the active principle acts on the totality of matter so as to constitute a divine rational animal: in other words, the entire cosmos is a god. They also maintain that the rational planning of this cosmic god (its divine providence) comprehensively determines how the various parts of the cosmos are constituted, and how those parts interact with one another, so as to produce an optimal cosmic order. **Nathan Powers** in "Stoic Theology and Providentialism" discusses the justifications offered by the early Stoics for these two key doctrines. He emphasizes the method that Stoics followed in their theological discourse (insofar as this can be recovered), as well as these doctrines' close connections to other aspects of Stoic physical theory. He also considers the influential legacy of Stoic theology, and the influential problems that it left in its wake.

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Ricardo Salles in "The Stoic Cosmos, from End to Beginning" considers the intriguing Stoic doctrine that the present cosmic order is destined to end in an all-consuming fire—the "conflagration"—and that an identical cosmic order will then be restored, and so on in an endless cycle. He explores the basis for this doctrine in Stoic physics, with special attention to Stoic views about the mechanics of elemental generation and inter-transformation. Along the way, Salles identifies possible areas of significant disagreement among the school's early leaders (Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus).

Chapters 14 through 16 showcase what the Stoics called the "logical" (*logikê*) part of philosophy. This part dealt with principles for formulating and assessing arguments, but also more broadly with how knowledge of the world is captured, articulated, expanded upon, and shared—that is, with functions of reasoning beings as such. And so, it included—in addition to what we would call logic—philosophy of language and epistemology.

Stoic views on language and formal logic outshone those of other ancient schools in breadth and sophistication. Indeed, the Stoic views exhibit (in some fundamental respects) a striking resemblance to the philosophy of language and propositional logic pioneered in modern times by Gottlieb Frege. Once this resemblance was perceived in the mid-twentieth century, scholars generally took it to be accidental, the

product of something like convergent evolution. However, it has recently been argued that Frege actually borrowed core elements of his own theories, without acknowledgment, from the Stoics.[21] The first two chapters in this section offer timely reassessments of Stoic achievements in this area.

The Stoics divide "logic" into rhetoric and dialectic. The latter includes the study of two objects: signifiers, or "utterances," and the incorporeal "sayables" (*lekta*) signified by utterances. The latter play an intermediary role between language and the world. In "The Stoics on Language," **Luca Castagnoli** considers some rival interpretations of what exactly sayables are. One class of sayables, namely "statables" (*axiômata*), are particularly important as the bearers of truth and falsity. Chrysippus—a key figure in the development of Stoic views in this area—theorized various ways (both truth-functional and non-truth-functional) that simple statables can be conjoined by connectives, studied arguments as systems of statables, and deployed the distinction between utterance and sayable to analyze the phenomenon of ambiguity.

In "Stoic Logic," **Paolo Crivelli** characterizes the respects in which Stoic statables resemble and differ from the propositions of modern logic. Crivelli discusses the truth-conditions that Stoics took various types of statables to have, focusing in particular on what Chrysippus and other Hellenistic dialecticians had to say about the case (controversial then as in modern times) of conditionals; he also considers Hellenistic controversies about the correct analysis of modal statements. Finally, he offers an account of the five "indemonstrables"—the only valid patterns of inference that Stoics acknowledged—along with the "posits" that allowed arguments in other forms to be reduced to one of the indemonstrables and so to be assessed as valid.

The Stoics analyze mental states exclusively in terms of representation (*phantasia*), and their epistemology is founded on a mode of cognition that, because of "its intrinsic features and the way in which it is produced," is both true and secure.[22] In "The Stoics on Mental Representation," **Victor Caston** develops a fresh interpretation of this crucial cognitive attitude, which the Stoics call *katalêpsis*, together with a new account of the Stoic theory of content and concepts generally. Beginning from perceptual cases of *phantasia* discussed by our sources, Caston defends a rigorously causal account of *katalêpsis* according to which a representation will be secure in the Stoics' technical sense just in case, in addition to meeting specific further conditions, it is caused in the relevant way by the object it represents. Caston moreover argues that, as an upshot of the Stoic theory of causation, the representations of non-rational animals possess a kind of propositional content that is prior to the acquisition of concepts. Concepts arise subsequent to experience in rational animals, enabling the subject to discriminate and articulate content that is already present.

Stoic theory identifies the human good with a secure knowledge of the natural order and the virtuous actions to which this knowledge gives rise. It treats circumstances and objectives external to virtue as indifferent and holds that their possession contributes nothing to the happy life. In "The Highest Good in Stoicism," **Jacob Klein** discusses two related episodes of controversy in which these views encountered significant criticism, first from Zeno's younger contemporary Aristo and later from Carneades, who developed forceful dialectical objections to the Stoic position based on his own sweeping classification of ethical views. Both episodes figure centrally in Cicero's presentation of Stoic ethics, which underscores a supposed instability in the doctrine of indifferents. Klein briefly surveys the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis*, which makes accurate cognition the basis of appropriate action in both animals and human agents, and he identifies the philosophical significance of Stoic ethics above all with the Socratic, cognitivist account of human psychology on which it is based.

In "Stoic Emotion: The Why and the How of Eliminating All Emotions," **Rachana Kamtekar** discusses the Stoic injunction to eliminate, rather than merely moderate, the emotions (*pathê*), together with closely related claims of Stoic moral psychology. Having considered some of the central evidence for the Stoic account, she argues that the emotions are rooted in every case in a two-part evaluative belief, involving an ascription of value—a belief about what is good or bad—together with a judgment about an appropriate practical or affective response. Kamtekar then considers the details of Stoic value theory and the Stoics' puzzling doctrine of indifferents to further clarify Stoic views of emotion. She turns finally to Stoic strategies for avoiding emotion,

offering a new account of the attitude the Stoics characterize as impulse with reservation, and considering Epictetus's counsel to replace anger with pity.

Zeno is said to have introduced the term *kathêkon* to designate actions that conform to rationally organized nature, and Stoics both early and late authored many treatises on the subject. In "The Stoics on Appropriate Action," **Georgia Tsouni** surveys our evidence for this important notion, which applied in its original context to
p. 17 the functions and activities of plants and animals no less than to the deliberate actions of human ↳ beings. Beginning with surviving definitions of the term in Greek and Latin sources, Tsouni explains the significance of the Stoic notion, together with a number of closely related distinctions: an appropriate action, when complete, is called a perfect action (*katorthôma*) and is contrasted with wrong action (*hamartêma*). As Tsouni observes, Cicero's treatise *De officiis*, patterned after a work by the Stoic Panaetius, constitutes some of our best evidence for the Stoic notion in Roman times. Tsouni further considers the treatment of appropriate actions in the later Stoic authors Musonius Rufus, Epictetus, and Hierocles, who apply the Stoic account in the discussion of specific action types. Arguably a precursor to modern conceptions of duty, particularly that of Kant, the Stoic notion exercised a lasting influence on ethical thought.

Susan Sauvé Meyer in "Fate, Cause, and Action in Stoicism" discusses the school's commitment to the claim that all events are causally determined to occur, with an emphasis on the conception of causation that underlies that doctrine: all bodies are causes *to* other bodies *of* incorporeal predicates obtaining, and all bodies in the cosmos are bound together in an inexorable causal nexus (fate), such that every body both has antecedent causes and is itself an antecedent cause. Meyer then turns to examine a forceful objection the Stoics faced: that the doctrine of fate renders praise and blame for human actions futile, since human actions, too, occur in accordance with fate. She emphasizes that in the form in which Hellenistic Stoics faced this criticism, the worry is about external bodies compelling humans to act as we do, and the response formulated by Chrysippus addresses that worry specifically. The debate (more familiar to us) about how human moral responsibility is compatible with the claim that all events are necessitated by antecedent causes, whether external or internal, developed out of exchanges between Stoics and their critics later in antiquity.

It is difficult to establish the extent to which the early Stoics were familiar with Aristotle's views, though it is certain that Chrysippus knew at least some of his works. In "Chrysippus and Aristotle on Goods," **Terence Irwin** addresses the question of the Stoics' engagement with Aristotle through a careful reading of a passage in which Plutarch reports that Chrysippus mentioned and discussed Aristotle's view on justice. According to Plutarch, Chrysippus is inconsistent on the question whether one can recognize non-moral goods without abolishing the virtues. Irwin shows, first, that the doctrines Chrysippus is said to discuss are present in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and, second, that Chrysippus's discussion of Aristotle as it figures in the quotations preserved by Plutarch shows a nuanced understanding of Aristotle's own views about pleasure and virtuous action. Chrysippus emerges on Irwin's account as a critical but charitable reader of Aristotle.

"Stoicism Comes to Rome: A Century of Modest Change" by **Brad Inwood** concludes this section of the volume. Inwood surveys philosophical developments in late-Hellenistic Stoicism, from the leadership of Diogenes of Babylon to that of Posidonius, covering the time in which the Athenian Stoic school dissolved and a Stoic school at Rhodes briefly rose to prominence; this was also the period in which the Stoics had their first
p. 18 extended interactions with Roman elites. The Stoics proved quite influential in ↳ Roman intellectual life, but Inwood argues that scholars have often overreached in their claims that there was a marked Stoic influence on Roman culture and politics more generally in the late Republic, although he considers two noteworthy exceptions: Publius Rutilius Rufus and Marcus Tullius Cicero.

4.4. The Skeptical Academy

By the middle of the third century BCE, Epicureanism and Stoicism were well established in Athens as innovative and energetic new movements with growing reputations abroad. During the rise of the new schools, Plato's Academy seems to have been largely preoccupied with the consolidation and elaboration of Plato's doctrines. But around 265 BCE, the Academy was suddenly enlivened by the determination of its new leader Arcesilaus to return to the dialectical practices exemplified in Plato's early Socratic dialogues (and evidently practiced in the Academy in Plato's own time). Having studied first with Theophrastus before transferring his allegiance to the Academy, Arcesilaus absorbed the best argumentative techniques of the day, and he may have been inspired as well by Pyrrho of Elis, whose moral example and detachment from dogma were well known at Athens. Though he himself wrote nothing, Arcesilaus inaugurated a powerful tradition of criticism, frequently directed at the Stoics, whom he engaged dialectically, refuting them on the basis of their own premises. This method reached new heights a century later in the hands of Carneades, whose criticisms of Stoic doctrine are reflected in many of our later sources for the period, including especially the dialogues of Cicero, the treatises of Plutarch and Sextus Empiricus, and the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias.

Arcesilaus was a figure of enormous controversy within his school: to some ancient observers he seemed, in his advocacy of suspension of judgment, to have vigorously embraced the Academy's Socratic heritage of open-ended inquiry; to others he was a purveyor of a futile and self-defeating skeptical dogmatism. In "Arcesilaus and the Academy's Skeptical Turn," **James Allen**, on the basis of a fresh and subtle evaluation of the evidence, puts forward a philosophical picture of Arcesilaus that respects the ancient puzzlement about his legacy. Allen argues that while Arcesilaus probably advanced the views attributed to him for the sake of argument and not on his own behalf, the nature of these dialectical moves directly inspired the gradual formation of a family of skeptical systems that we find in the later Hellenistic Academy and beyond.

In "The Stoics and Carneades: Dialectic and the Holding of Views," **Richard Bett** begins with a consideration of the Stoic response to Arcesilaus, which had two main components. First, there was Chrysippus's defense of the cognitive impression as the criterion of true belief, and second, a related Stoic counterattack against the Academics: if in the absence of such a criterion (as the Academics argued) one ought to suspend judgment on all matters, how are human choice and action possible? (This is the *apraxia* or "inaction" argument.) Carneades's forceful and subtle reply involved setting up, as an alternative criterion, the "persuasive" (*pithanos*) impression, to which we ought to give not assent but approval; this is sufficient to guide inquiry and action. On
p. 19 Bett's ↳ interpretation, this stance left Carneades free to hold views on his own behalf (and not just to advance claims dialectically against opponents), so long as he kept to the terms of his own reply to the Stoics.

Though adherents of the skeptical Academy did not profess positive ethical views, they nonetheless exerted significant influence on the development of ethical thought in antiquity. In "Platonic Ethics from the Old to the New Academy," **J. P. F. Wynne** argues that we can discern a characteristic Academic outlook with respect to ethics, one that addresses the difficulties we face "as rational souls united to human bodies."[23] Wynne traces this outlook in the arguments advanced by leading figures of both the Old and New Academy, with special attention to the influential classification of ethical theories devised by Carneades. On Wynne's account, the so-called Carneadean division (*Carneadea divisio*) amounts to an effective mapping-out, within the Socratic tradition, of possible views about the highest good; this mapping-out set an agenda for ethics in the latter part of the Hellenistic period and was eventually absorbed into the broader philosophical tradition.

This section concludes with two chapters that consider from different perspectives the fallout from a major late-Hellenistic crisis within the Academy that catalyzed broader changes within Greek philosophy. **David Sedley** in "The Legacies of Academic Skepticism" traces the disintegration of the "New" (Skeptical) Academy in the early first century BCE, showing that this was due primarily to two mutually reinforcing factors: ongoing doctrinal differences over the legacy of Carneades, which represented a standing tension in the school; and the loss of institutional identity that came with the loss of the school's centralized headquarters (the Academy

grounds) in Athens and the subsequent diaspora of its members. Sedley offers an interpretation of the final schism between Philo of Larissa (Cicero's teacher) and Antiochus, which led also to Aenesidemus's departure from the Academy and his establishment in Alexandria of a radical new skeptical movement (the subject of chapter 27). Sedley concludes with some observations about how the end of the Academy heralded the end of Hellenistic philosophy more generally and paved the way for the rise of "Middle" Platonism, a dispersed movement centered more directly on the study and explication of the corpus of Plato's texts—an approach that would eventually be extended to Aristotle's writings as well.

The renegade Academic Aenesidemus believed that his school, in the wake of Carneades's engagement with the Stoics, had veered too close to the latter's epistemological stance, and thereby too close to adopting Stoic-like views on a wide array of questions. He reacted to this situation by founding the "Pyrrhonist" skeptical movement, which resisted the rising tide of post-Hellenistic dogmatism described in Sedley's chapter. In "The Pyrrhonist Rejection of Academic Epistemology," **Whitney Schwab** offers a fresh account of this movement's fundamental philosophical stance, a subject of considerable controversy. According to some influential modern interpretations, Pyrrhonists adopted the radical aim of freeing themselves from *all beliefs*, leaving it unclear how they could respond to Stoic challenges about how (in the absence of beliefs) to deliberate and choose actions. But Schwab argues that Aenesidemus and his followers presented themselves as "inquirers" (*skeptikoi*)
p. 20 because they developed skills and ↳ techniques for suspending judgment specifically on the conclusions of *arguments* such as those produced by rival philosophers, thus keeping theoretical questions open to further inquiry. This strategy left them free to hold a wide range of everyday beliefs and to act in accordance with them.

4.5. The Early Modern Reception of Hellenistic Philosophy

The volume's final section offers an overview of the reception of Hellenistic philosophy in the intellectual life of early modern Europe, a scene on which Epicureanism, Stoicism, and ancient skepticism had a particularly decisive impact. This was due to a confluence of factors: the rediscovery (in the West) of ancient source material on the Hellenistic schools, newly promulgated in editions and translations; the waning force and cohesion of the Aristotelian consensus in scholastic philosophy; and importantly, the ways in which the themes of Hellenistic philosophy resonated with (and spoke to) early modern concerns, offering (for example) new frameworks for physical theory in a time of scientific ferment and new tools for thinking about the epistemic authority of competing religious claims in a time of dissent within (and conflict among) faith traditions.

Stewart Duncan and **Antonia LoLordo** in "Early Modern Accounts of Epicureanism" begin with two seventeenth-century figures of particular importance for the modern reception of Epicureanism: Pierre Gassendi, who gave a largely sympathetic account of the Epicurean system, and Ralph Cudworth, who engaged extensively with Epicurus as a pernicious enemy to be refuted. Duncan and LoLordo then survey key areas in which Epicureanism loomed large in early modern philosophical discourse (following the trails blazed by Gassendi and Cudworth). These include atomism as a physical theory; materialism about the mind; and two religious views persistently associated with ancient Epicureans: atheism (an incorrect charge, historically speaking) and the denial of divine providence (an accurate charge).

John Sellars in "The Early Modern Legacy of the Stoics" untangles the complicated story of Stoic influence in the period. While Cicero and Seneca had been (and remained) particularly influential ancient authorities on Stoic thought, presenting Stoic ethics especially in an attractive light, it was above all Lipsius's magisterial sourcebooks that first allowed widespread discussion of the Hellenistic Stoic system in its own right, placing the Stoics' ethics firmly in the context of their physical theory. A prominent theme in these discussions, as Sellars shows, is the question of whether (and how and to what extent) Stoicism can be reconciled with Christian doctrine. By the end of the period, the differences between Stoicism and Christianity were visible in

much sharper relief—but in ways that made the Stoics more (and not less) popular in some philosophical quarters.

In the volume's final chapter, "The Reception of Ancient Skepticism in Early Modern Europe," **Anton M. Matytsin** surveys the pervasive and lasting impact that the rediscovery and revival of ancient skepticism had
p. 21 on early modern European philosophy (and ↳ intellectual life more broadly). In doing so he pays close attention to the ways in which the two main ancient traditions of Academic skepticism on one hand and Pyrrhonism on the other maintained, if not quite separate identities, then distinct valences in this new context. He also distinguishes between thinkers whose projects involved a systematic skeptical rejection of dogmatism (for example, Montaigne, Descartes, Bayle, and Hume) and those who deployed skeptical techniques on a more tactical basis, for example to challenge established political or religious authority or, contrarily, to mount a fideistic defense of religion.

Abbreviations Used in This Volume

DL
Dorandi, T., ed. (2013) *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

LS
Long, A. A., and D. Sedley (1987) *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (2 vols.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Example: LS 42C = Long and Sedley, section 42, text C. (The reader may refer to vol. 1 for the text in English translation, and vol. 2 for the text in the original language.)]

SVF
von Arnim, H. (1903–5) *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (3 vols.); vol. 4 (1924), indexes by M. Adler. Leipzig: Teubner. [Example: *SVF* 3.1021 = von Arnim, vol. 3, text 1021.]

Usener
Usener, H. (1887) *Epicurea*. Leipzig: Teubner.

Further chapter-specific abbreviations are noted within the volume's individual chapters.

Notes

1. Johann Gustav Droysen adopted the term "Hellenistic" in his influential *Geschichte des Hellenismus* (1836–43), using it to characterize the period from the death of Alexander to the birth of Christ and emphasizing the fusion (*Verschmelzung*) of East and West that allegedly occurred in the wake of Alexander's conquests. Important reassessments of Droysen include Bravo 1968, Momigliano 1970, Bichler 1983, and Payen 2005. Contemporary scholars vary in their understanding of the eastward expansion of Greek culture and its impact on and absorption by local communities in this period; for discussion, see Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987, Bingen 2007, Moyer 2011, Mairs 2014, and Clancier et al. 2017.

2. On Alexander's life, see Green 1991 and Cartledge 2004; for an overview of his campaign and the governance of the territories he conquered, see Bosworth 1988, Briant 2010, and Worthington 2014; on the conflicts among Alexander's would-be successors, see Romm 2011 and Waterfield 2011. For good general overviews of the Hellenistic period, see Shipley 2000, Errington 2008, and Thonemann 2016; for a detailed political narrative, see Walbank et al. 1984; for useful discussion of particular social, economic, and cultural aspects of the period, see Erskine 2003 and Bugh 2006.

3. See Fraser 1972 and Pfeiffer 1968: 87–104.

4. On Hellenistic Athens, see Habicht 1997 and Worthington 2021.

5. Sedley 1980: 2.

6. According to the conventional historical periodization, the "Hellenistic" era concluded with the Roman general Octavian's victory in 31 BCE over the last of the Ptolemies. (This was Cleopatra, who had famously allied herself with Octavian's rival
p. 24 Mark Antony in ↳ the Roman civil wars.) Octavian, before long inaugurated as the first Roman emperor Augustus, thereafter numbered the Greeks of the Mediterranean among his subjects.

7. For an overview of ancient Cynicism, see Desmond 2008; for its influence on Hellenistic ethics, see Long 1996. On the Cyrenaics, see Tsouna 1998 and Sedley 2016. On the Megarics and the Dialectical school, see Sedley 1977 as well as Bobzien and Duncombe 2023.

8. On Pyrrho's stance of non-assertion, see Bett 1994 (partly reworked into Bett 2003's chapter 1, "Pyrrho the Non-Sceptic") and Powers 2001.

9. Particularly in its early period, the Epicurean Garden is perhaps better characterized as a philosophical community, one whose members, besides studying the teachings of its founder, adopted a characteristic mode of life emphasizing friendship and simplicity and marked by reverence for Epicurus himself. For discussion, see Clay 2009, Natali 2013, and Dorandi 2020.

10. It is probable that Epicurus's hedonism was partly shaped as a reaction to that of the Cyrenaics, and his work *On Nature* seems to allude to Diodorus Cronus. See further Sedley 1976 and 2016.

11. By the middle of the second century BCE, the views associated with these movements were regularly characterized as *haireseis*—comprehensive "outlooks" or "persuasions" adopted by adherents to the major schools. On uses of this term in the Hellenistic period, see Glucker 1978: chapter 4. For discussion of the Hellenistic schools as institutions, see Natali 2000, esp. 198-209, and Bénatouïl 2006.

12. In the case of the Stoics, we also know of significant controversies within the early school itself, especially between Zeno and Aristo. It is perhaps misleading to speak of an early Stoic "orthodoxy."

13. The Greek world in the third and second centuries BCE saw the development of empirically oriented research programs in venues such as the Athenian Lyceum and, more importantly, Alexandria (where scholars enjoyed a rich array of resources under the patronage of the Ptolemies; see note 3). Philosophy and the special sciences were becoming increasingly autonomous from each other. The narrative of decline in Hellenistic Aristotelianism was emphatically and enthusiastically endorsed by Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, who wrote of the school's *Totenschlaf* or "death-sleep" (1881: 83). This view has been widely echoed: e.g., Lynch 1972's chapter 5 begins, "[T]he history of the Peripatetic School after Aristotle and Theophrastus may be summed up in one word: decline." One's assessment of this claim will of course vary with what one accepts as signs of "decline," since members of the Lyceum continued to advance the frontiers of research in a number of specialized areas. It is however clear that the school substantially withdrew in this period from Aristotle's own aspirations to systematic and comprehensive philosophy, and in particular from the sort of ethical theorizing that lay at the heart of the Socratic tradition, which led to the lack of an overall "Aristotelian" perspective (and advocated way of life) to match those of the Epicureans, Stoics, and Academics. (Even so, it should be noted that Hellenistic Aristotelians did engage dialectically with other schools on ethical questions; see Inwood 2014, esp. chapter 3.) Lefebvre 2016 gives a nuanced discussion of the topic. For our current knowledge of the Hellenistic Lyceum, the material collected by Wehrli (1944–1978) is foundational. This material is extended and further discussed by volumes in the Rutgers University Studies series under the general editorship of William Fortenbaugh and (since 2018) David Mirhady (published by Routledge; information about these volumes is available at https://www.routledge.com/Rutgers-University-Studies-in-Classical-Humanities/book-
p. 25 series/TRANRUSCH). Sharples 2010 offers a judicious selection of both Hellenistic ↳ and post-Hellenistic Peripatetic source material in translation, with insightful commentary, that is more accessible to the general reader.

14. Bobzien 2021.

15. Cf. Inwood, this volume. For an overview of Greek philosophy in the first century BCE, see the relevant sections of Sharples 2007.

16. Cf. Algra et al., 1999.

17. Long, this volume.

18. The threefold division is first associated with Xenocrates of Chalcedon, successor to Speusippus as head of the Academy.

19. Taylor, this volume.

20. Though this view of Chrysippean “orthodoxy” has recently been questioned by Algra (forthcoming).

21. Bobzien 2021.

22. Caston, this volume.

23. Wynne, this volume.

24. The authors would like to thank Daniel Tober for many helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

6. Bibliography

The following bibliography indicates some works of scholarship on Hellenistic philosophy that encompass the entire period, or that offer a synoptic or comprehensive treatment of a major Hellenistic school, with an emphasis on work that is relatively recent. We have not attempted to be comprehensive, and many excellent studies and collections with a narrower focus have been excluded. (Readers are especially encouraged to consult the volumes in the *Symposium Hellenisticum* series, published by various presses since 1978.) For scholarship on topics covered by individual chapters in this volume, see the lists of works provided at the end of each chapter. Note in particular that sourcebooks on Hellenistic philosophy are covered in chapter 2.[24]

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6.1. General Works on Hellenistic Philosophy

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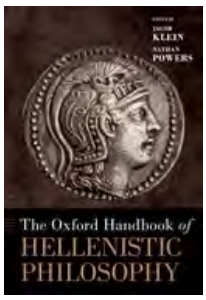
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CHAPTER

1 The Cast of Characters: Major Figures of Hellenistic Philosophy

A. A. Long

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the chronology and scope of Hellenistic philosophy, as embodied in its three major schools: the Garden, the Stoa, and the Academy. It situates these schools in their historical and social contexts and discusses some figures who had a special formative influence on them, including Pyrrho of Elis. It then introduces the most distinctive leaders and exponents of each of the three schools, offering biographical overviews of Epicurus, Zeno, Aristo, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Arcesilaus, Carneades, and Clitomachus. Particular attention is paid to the education of these figures, the main circumstances of their lives, their intellectual contributions and books, and legacies.

Keywords: Hellenistic philosophy, Garden, Stoa, Academy, Lyceum

Subject: Classical Philosophy, Philosophy

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Hellenistic philosophy, as this book's Introduction has explained, is a notion that has many connotations. At its broadest, it comprehends all the schools of thought and practitioners that were designated by such names as Epicurean and Stoic, and that were active during all or part of the period from about 320–40 BCE. A complete list would include, in addition to those mentioned, Academics, Peripatetics, Pyrrhonists, Cynics, Cyrenaics, Megarians, Eretrians, and Pythagoreans. All these figures merit some mention in historical surveys of Hellenistic philosophy, but in practice the scope of the term is mainly restricted to the schools and individuals that mark the most distinctive and influential features of this intellectual epoch. These comprise, first and foremost, the Stoics and Epicureans, whose schools were newly established in the last years of the fourth century, as well as the philosophers who continued the tradition of the Academy founded some 70 years earlier by Plato, and who came to be called Academics. Historians typically include skepticism as a prominent

Hellenistic movement. This is correct according to modern usage of the term, but Hellenistic skepticism was not a self-styled school but a phase of the Academy.[1]

A case could be made for including the Peripatetics as a fourth major school and movement of Hellenistic philosophy.[2] At the beginning of the period, following Aristotle's death in 322, his Athenian school (variously called Lyceum or Peripatos) came under the direction of Theophrastus of Eresus. This man headed the school for 40 years. During the first two decades of his leadership, he was far and away the most productive and celebrated philosopher in Athens. He continued and extended Aristotle's scientific work, in biology especially, and made significant contributions to logic and ethics. His systematic studies of the early Greek philosophers formed the basis of the historical doxographies transmitted to us by scholars of late antiquity. His lectures on rhetoric at Athens also attracted large audiences.

Under Theophrastus's successor Strato of Lampsacus (d. c. 268), the Peripatos continued to flourish especially
p. 29 in empirical science, and to interact to some extent with ↳ the other schools, but thereafter it declined. One reason for its eclipse was the shift from Athens to Alexandria as the center for scientific research, under the patronage of the Ptolemies. Also, empirical science was not a hot subject in the new Stoic and Epicurean schools, where students were being attracted by their promises of a comprehensive philosophy of life. Nothing so inspirational was on offer from the Peripatos at this time. During the next two centuries, the school flickered back into life, but only intermittently. This happened in the second century, when the Peripatos was headed by Critolaus of Phaselis. He engaged in controversy with the Stoics on ethics and cosmology. Along with the Academic Carneades and the Stoic Diogenes of Babylon, Critolaus served as an ambassador to Rome.[3]

Individual Peripatetic philosophers will figure in this handbook when their ideas impinge on the work's main themes. For the most part, however, they were only peripherally involved in the distinctive issues and debates of Hellenistic philosophy.

What of the other philosophers mentioned above—Pyrrhonists, Cynics, Cyrenaics, Megarians, Eretrians, and Pythagoreans? Pyrrho, whose name was adopted by later skeptics, did not found the skeptical movement as an official school, but he deserves treatment, indeed primary mention, in our cast of characters. "Pythagorean topics" were the subject of a book by Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school, but the widespread interest in Pythagoras that generated a spate of apocryphal works by this largely legendary figure dates from the later years of our period. The Cynics, Cyrenaics, Megarians, and Eretrians (all sometimes disparagingly called "the minor Socratics") were active in their own identities during the early Hellenistic years. Soon, however, they dropped out of the mainstream and ceased to exist as distinct movements.[4] Cynicism, as we shall see, was a major influence on Zeno's Stoicism, and Zeno also incorporated Megarian logic. The Cyrenaics had made a mark as radical hedonists, but their movement, after splintering into distinct sects, lacked the strength to survive the impact of Epicurus's subtler brand of hedonism. In effect, the strongest philosophical points of these Socratic schools survived by absorption into the three leading schools: the Stoa, the Garden (Epicurus's school), and the Academy.

1. Pyrrho of Elis (Northwestern Peloponnese), c. 360–270 BCE

Pyrrho has a strong claim to occupy first place in this handbook's cast of characters, not only by virtue of chronology, but also as a charismatic, quasi-skeptical guru at the beginning of the epoch, and as an emblematic name for the originator of official skepticism at the end.[5] His introduction to philosophy came largely from association with Anaxarchus, who was born in the flourishing city of Abdera on the northern coast of the Aegean Sea. Abdera had been the hometown of the celebrated atomist philosopher Democritus, whose long and
p. 30 prolific life lasted about a hundred years from 460–360 ↳ BCE. Anaxarchus's biography (DL 9.58–60) associates him with Democritus and neighboring philosophers of a skeptical tendency. Abdera at that time was under the control of Macedonia. When Alexander the Great set off on his eastern conquests in the year 334, Anaxarchus accompanied him as court philosopher, and he in turn took the young Pyrrho with him.[6]

How Pyrrho, living in distant Elis, came to be first acquainted with Anaxarchus we cannot say. What Anaxarchus could have helped to generate, judging from Pyrrho's mature philosophy, was a psychological link between happiness, construed as tranquility, and a conviction that we have no secure access to truth. Anaxarchus likened supposedly real things to illusory stage paintings and dream-like experiences (LS 1D); and Pyrrho is reputed to have begun his career as a painter (LS 1A).

The most intriguing item in Pyrrho's biography is his consorting with so-called naked sages in India and being led to conclude from these encounters that "nothing exists in truth, and that convention and habit are the basis of everything" (LS 1A). The value of this testimony has been greatly discussed and often contested.[7] While the antecedents of Pyrrho's outlook and lifestyle are accountable without recourse to his Indian experiences, a serious Brahmin influence on him should not be ruled out as a complete fabrication. Whatever it amounted to, there are definite affinities between popular accounts of Pyrrho's remarkable composure and indifference to pain, and reports of Indian ascetics both then and now.

Having returned to Greece, Pyrrho lived in a manner that generated admiration and fame for his extraordinary composure and contentment. We can plausibly attribute to him the following positions (or perhaps they should be called practices): (1) explicit or implicit rejection of philosophy as an open-ended exploration and attempt to discover the nature of things; (2) detachment from argument and dialectic; (3) view of the world as radically indeterminate and therefore not graspable; and (4) the consequential ideal and embodiment of tranquility. This last would become the generally sought-after goal of Hellenistic philosophy both technically and in popular esteem.

Pyrrho did not publish books. His seemingly spontaneous and unconventional lifestyle, similar in some respects to Cynicism, inspired Timon (from Phlius, in the northeastern Peloponnese) to eulogize him and to critique contemporary and earlier philosophers as a worthless collection of competitive braggarts and airheads.[8] Fragments of Timon's *Lampoons* (*Silloi*) and other writings are a precious source of information not only about Pyrrho but also about how other philosophers could be perceived through a deliberately comic, skeptical, and distorted lens.

Because he founded no school, Pyrrho's direct impact was restricted to those of his contemporaries who knew him or knew of him. He influenced among others Nausiphanes and Epicurus in the earliest phase of Hellenistic philosophy, and was taken note of somewhat later by the Stoic Aristo and perhaps also by the Academic Arcesilaus.[9] According to Cicero, writing in the middle years of the first century BCE, Pyrrho had long been a figure of no interest, yet within a few years of that time his name would be retrieved and revived as the eponymous patron of the skeptic way of life.[10]

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2. Epicurus (341–271 BCE) and the Garden

Epicurus was exceptional among Hellenistic philosophers in being both an Athenian citizen by birthright and in not being regularly resident in the city until, at the age of 35, he established his Garden school in the precincts.[11] Immigrant philosophers like Zeno and Arcesilaus became Athenian residents much younger and received their primary philosophical formation there. For most of his early life, Epicurus lived in cities of the Ionian islands and mainland, though he spent the year 323 in Athens on compulsory military service. As a precocious student (DL 10.14), Epicurus no doubt absorbed some influence from the Athenian philosophical scene, but the attested influences on him were from elsewhere, including an encounter as a schoolboy in Samos with a Platonist teacher named Pamphilus (DL 10.14) and study with the Democritean atomist Nausiphanes of Teos, probably after his year of service in Athens.

The mature Epicurus was unremittingly hostile to Plato's cosmology, theology, and metaphysics. It is tempting to think that this antipathy had already surfaced when Epicurus chose to study with Nausiphanes, but a more mundane reason for his choice of teacher is the proximity of Teos to Samos. We know little about Nausiphanes's philosophy beyond his general endorsement of Democritean physics and ethics.[12] In maturity, Epicurus described Nausiphanes as a complete scoundrel (DL 10.8).[13] What they definitely shared was an admiration for Pyrrho's tranquility and lifestyle, knowledge of which reached Epicurus directly from Nausiphanes, who had been one of Pyrrho's leading acolytes (LS 1B). The Epicurean goal of life was *ataraxia* (freedom from mental disturbance), and Pyrrho was its most celebrated exponent and embodiment in Epicurus's youth. Nausiphanes also appears to have inherited Democritus's distrust of appearances as a source of knowledge. This will not have endeared him to the ardent empiricist that Epicurus soon became. If Nausiphanes advocated a philosopher's involvement in politics, as he seems to have done, that will have been a further reason for Epicurus's professed hostility to him.

Some time after leaving Nausiphanes, Epicurus launched himself on a teaching career, founding a school first in Mytilene on the island of Lesbos and soon after that in the port of Lampsacus on the south coast of the Hellespont. There he met a number of men who became his life-long friends and disciples, including Metrodorus (later his deputy at Athens), Hermarchus (his successor as head of the Garden), and Idomeneus (a wealthy patron and correspondent).[14] In 306 BCE, after five years of successful recruitment of students from Ionia, Epicurus moved his center of operations to Athens. For a substantial sum, helped no doubt by his supporters, Epicurus purchased the land that became the Garden location of his school, just outside the city walls and adjacent to the grounds of the Academy.

Epicurus was a prolific writer of books and letters. Over several years, he drafted a work *On nature* in 37 books (meaning rolls of papyrus), each about as long as 30 pages of a modern printed volume. Extensive fragments of this work have been preserved in papyri recovered from the eighteenth-century excavations of Herculaneum.[15]
p. 32 *On Nature* was the ↳ main source of the Roman Epicurean poet Lucretius's great poem *De rerum natura*, from which much of our knowledge of Epicurean physics is derived. Also extant are three long letters on basic doctrines that Epicurus wrote to three of his followers, and a collection of 40 ethical maxims that they were required to memorize.[16] Epicurus called himself an "autodidact," which earned him charges of plagiarizing Democritus in physics and the Cyrenaic Aristippus in ethics. His self-description was hyperbolical, but not unjustified as a claim to the Garden's cultural originality and the systematic coherence of Epicurean philosophy.

Modern research (drawing largely on the papyrus remains of his work) has revealed Epicurus to have been actively involved in contemporary philosophical debates.[17] He was a typical Greek philosopher in his critical attention to his predecessors, targeting especially Plato's cosmological and theological dialogue *Timaeus*, and showing some interest in Aristotle's work in physics and logic. In three major respects, however, Epicurus was quite distinctive—in abjuring all speculation concerning "non-evident things," in presenting his system as complete and absolutely certain in its foundations, and in his own, or at least his school's, hostility to Socrates

and the Socratic tradition. These features of his philosophy, especially the third one, put him and the Garden on a collision course with the newly emergent Stoic school.

Epicurus's followers, who included women and slaves, reverenced him as a god, celebrating his life with monthly and annual celebrations in the Garden. Did he set out to be viewed as their "savior"? Not perhaps with the cultic intentions dear to so many messianic figures, but he did not seemingly discourage worship, and he presumably supported the majestic image of his face and seated body that was sculpted and widely circulated.[18]

Thanks to the preservation of some of his letters and his lengthy will (DL 10.16-21), Epicurus is the single Hellenistic philosopher whose character and personality we can recover in some depth and detail. He ran the Garden, whose members included his three brothers, as something of a family business. He left instructions for his parents and brothers to be regularly memorialized, and for the conduct of monthly celebrations of himself and Metrodorus. The will provided for the continuation of the school in perpetuity, and for supporting his leading disciples and their children. His slaves were to be given their freedom, and he bequeathed his books to Hermarchus. The sources leave the impression of a man who lived a life of the friendship that was supremely valued in Epicurean philosophy, and who generated great affection among the many whose lives he generously supported.

3. The Stoa under Its First Leaders, 300–200 BCE

3.1. Zeno of Citium (c. 334–262)

Zeno, founder of the Stoic school, was born in the Cypriot city of Citium (modern Larnaka). He settled in Athens in about the year 310 and began teaching there a decade later.[19] His followers were originally called Zenonians.
p. 33 The name Stoics became attached ↳ to them because Zeno frequented the Painted Colonnade (*Stoa Poikilê*) in the city center, where he lectured "pacing up and down" (DL 7.5). His choice of this public setting for his school's location was a striking contrast to Epicurus's suburban Garden. Moreover, unlike Epicurus, who had the means to purchase land, Zeno was not an affluent man. His biography emphasizes frugality and contempt for wealth. By the end of his life, however, Zeno appears to have been comfortably provided for, thanks to patronage from King Antigonus Gonatus of Macedonia, and so able to support students and have the resources to teach, study, and write at leisure.

The Stoa, as Zeno's chosen meeting point, gave him immediate and free access to all and sundry. Unlike Epicurus again, whose Garden denizens were the founder's family, friends and acquaintances, Zeno, according to near contemporary biographers, was often to be found on the streets of Athens, engaging in discussions with other philosophers. His first and most famous publication was *Politeia*, a utopian ideal of society that incorporated radical Cynicism in its economics and sexual freedoms, and criticized Plato's similarly entitled work conventionally translated as *Republic*. Some of Zeno's students became active in politics. The founder of the school, no doubt from the outset, was determined to make sure that his students not withdraw completely from public life as required by the stance of Epicurus.

Zeno was written up by numerous people. They included his own student contemporaries, and biographers ranging in date from his own lifetime up to the middle years of the first century BCE, when the Stoa was no longer functioning as a teaching institution. This plethora of sources and time frame make many details of his career and character hard to ascertain in detail and consistency. In the earliest sources, Zeno, having recently arrived in Athens, was directed to the Cynic Crates after reading in a bookshop Xenophon's accounts of Socrates. According to a later account, Zeno, while still a boy in Cyprus, was encouraged by his mercantile father to read "books" about Socrates; he was thus already motivated to move to Athens for a philosophical education under Crates as Socrates's closest living embodiment. Zeno's early Cynic training inspired his *Politeia*

and his ethical ideal of a rational life in agreement with nature. It also, we can be sure, promoted Zeno's presence as an Athenian philosopher to be reckoned with. For Zeno's later biographers, however, Cynicism, unlike Socrates, was too scandalous to attach strongly to the founder of the Stoic school, and so the biographical account we read in Diogenes Laertius (our fullest source) intermittently tones Zeno down to the point at times of making him seem bland and priggish.[20]

Zeno turned to other teachers after Crates, but he never disavowed his indebtedness to the famous Cynic and honored his memory by publishing a book of *Recollections of Crates*, following Xenophon's example as Socrates's memorialist. Zeno's "bookishness" rings true, not only for his learning about Socrates by reading Xenophon but also for his writing about such topics as Greek education, the reading of poetry, Homeric problems, and Pythagorean topics. Modern research has indicated his close familiarity with Plato's dialogues as well as with Xenophon. It was no doubt due to Zeno's encouragement that Cleanthes, his chosen successor, made the detailed study of Heraclitus that has left a strong mark on Stoic cosmology.

From Crates Zeno moved on to hear and debate with other philosophers. These included the most celebrated
p. 34 controversialists of the time: Stilpo of Megara, the ↳ Dialectician Diodorus Cronus, and also a student of Diodorus named Philo.[21] Under their influence, Zeno honed his own skills as a debater. He took great interest in logical puzzles and, while not himself a creative logician, marked the Stoa as a school, unlike the Garden, where logic could flourish as it would soon do spectacularly under Chrysippus, Zeno's second successor, who became antiquity's most creative logician after Aristotle.[22] Stilpo, a friend and sparring partner of Crates, was equally celebrated for his simple and honorable lifestyle, much like that of the Cynics, and he no doubt influenced the development of Zeno's ethics, both in its austerity and its logical rigor.

Zeno's final encounter with an established teacher was in the Platonic Academy under its current leader named Polemo. This philosopher will figure importantly when I consider the life and career of his Academic successor Arcesilaus. As to Polemo's significance for Zeno's philosophy, there is much to conjecture but virtually nothing to say for certain owing to a paucity of secure information.[23] This is how Polemo is mentioned in Diogenes Laertius's *Life of Zeno* (7.25):

> After Zeno had made great progress in his studies with Diodorus, he also attended Polemo's school because he gave himself no airs (a Cynic compliment). So Polemo is reputed to have said: "I see you, Zeno, slipping in by the garden door, stealing my doctrines and giving them a Phoenician dress."[24]

Polemo's witticism hardly rings true for its purported chronology during the two men's lifetimes. What it fits, rather, is the philosophical scene two hundred years later when the Academic Antiochus claimed that Stoicism was virtually remodeled and rephrased Platonism.[25] We can be certain that Zeno encountered Polemo, but for what may have transpired between them we must turn from biography to the interpretation of the evidence concerning Zeno's philosophy. If we date Zeno's arrival in Athens to the year 310, he will have had about ten years to spend under the tutelage of Crates and other philosophers before starting to teach in the Stoa.

Zeno's attested teachers do not include Theophrastus at the Peripatos. This absence does not in the least imply that Aristotelian ideas had no impact upon Zeno in his formative years. However, the biographical silence about Theophrastus is striking because Aristotle's and Theophrastus's names do occur in the contemporary accounts of Epicurus, and the young Arcesilaus attended Theophrastus's lectures before joining the Academy.

Zeno spent the rest of his life, close to 40 years, in the city. From many perspectives, including civic honors, poetic accolades, and retrospective assessments by later biographers and followers, Zeno at the time of his death was Athens's most renowned philosopher and resident, in poignant contrast with the fate of Socrates 100 years before the origin of the Stoic school. Yet, in spite of all this distinction, Zeno left his school in considerable disarray. Aristo of Chios, by some accounts his most brilliant student, recanted his allegiance to Zeno and was reputed to have founded his own school. Herillus of Carthage, another leading follower, went his own way, and

p. 35 Dionysius of Heraclea deserted Zeno for the Cyrenaics.[26] Persaeus of Citium, Zeno's special protégée ↳ and housemate, left Athens for Macedonia, and Sphaerus of Bosporus migrated to the court of Ptolemy in Alexandria.[27] It was left to Cleanthes of Assos, Zeno's most faithful student, to take over the school and head it effectively enough over the next 30 years to assure its future under the headship of his student Chrysippus.

What was Zeno's curriculum, we may ask, and how did he conduct his classes? Our information about him is heavy on anecdotes, but Zeno the practicing teacher and innovative philosopher remains largely elusive. We have some of his pithy syllogisms.[28] But otherwise, few of his own words, unlike those of Epicurus, are recorded verbatim.[29]Ancient accounts of Stoic philosophy do not generally distinguish Zeno's specific contributions from what became the mainstream doctrines of the school. That he authorized the canonical principles of Stoic cosmology, epistemology, and ethics, as these were perceived within the long-term Stoic tradition, is quite certain. Yet the form in which he bequeathed them to his successors seems to have been much more fluid and inchoate than the doctrinal legacy of Epicurus.

That brings us back to the state of the school at Zeno's death or perhaps still earlier. How did the Stoa's doctrinal schisms come about? The philosophical ruptures were primarily due, it seems, to two major factors: first, internal disagreement concerning the scope of the curriculum and its appropriate relationship to Cynic "indifference" of all non-moral values; and second, controversy over epistemology between the Stoa and the Academy. The philosophical issues that were at stake on both points are much too considerable to be explored in this scene-setting chapter. They will be treated at appropriate points later in this volume.[30] What I will do here is present the two figures most intimately involved in these issues—Aristo and the Academic Arcesilaus—their mutual involvement, and their relationship to Zeno himself.

3.2. Aristo of Chios (c. 310–240 BCE)

Nicknamed Siren, because of his fine and beguiling voice, Aristo made a striking impression on those who heard him.[31] Details of his life are sparse but sufficient to justify his reputation as one of the outstanding thinkers and debaters during the formative years of Hellenistic philosophy. One of his students Eratosthenes of Cyrene went on to become head of the Alexandrian library and the most celebrated polymath among that city's learned elite. Aristo's lectures on virtue won him a following large enough to give him the reputation of founding a school of Aristoneans (DL 7.161).

Like most Hellenistic philosophers, Aristo was an immigrant to Athens. He was probably attracted by Zeno's growing fame, but his name and activities are closely linked not only with Zeno but also with Zeno's official successors Cleanthes and Chrysippus, and most interestingly and fully with Arcesilaus, who became head of the Academy a few years before Zeno died (DL 7.162–3, 171, 183). Aristo described Arcesilaus in a brilliant parody of Homeric verse as a philosophical chimera: "Plato in front, Pyrrho in back, Diodorus in the middle" (DL 4.33).[32] The two men had seemingly become first acquainted when, so it is said (DL 7.162), Aristo spent time
p. 36 with Polemo, long-standing ↳ head of the Academy before Arcesilaus, and gave up his allegiance to Zeno, who was seriously ill at the time. This biographical morsel, obviously designed to cast aspersions against Aristo for disloyalty, has probably been distorted by Zeno's later fan club. But Aristo's encounter with Polemo is not only plausible in itself but also suggestive for its possible impact on Aristo's philosophical break with Zeno; for Polemo, we are told, "was in the habit of saying that people should be trained in practical matters and not in dialectical theorems" (DL 4.18). Aristo also completely repudiated dialectic (DL 7.161), writing at length *Against the Dialecticians*, although the subject had been strongly esteemed by Zeno, as we have seen.

Besides dialectic, Aristo deprecated the study of "physics." This topic—comprising cosmology, theology, and biology—had been central to Zeno's philosophy. Aristo instead thought that Stoicism should confine itself to ethics (DL 7.160). The text describing Aristo's turn to Polemo continues: "Aristo was especially attached to the Stoic doctrine that the wise man does not hold an opinion," meaning a merely fallible belief as distinct from a

judgment that has unimpeachable certainty. Aristo inherited this doctrine, which has Socratic overtones, from Zeno, but he clearly thought that Zeno had failed to maintain such a cautious principle in his speculations about physics. The most famous contemporary figure to reject physics out of hand was Pyrrho. There are strong affinities between Pyrrho's ideal of philosophical detachment and Aristo's ethics of absolute "indifference" to all non-moral and conventional values.[33] Was Polemo, we may ask, also Aristo's mentor in his disagreements with Zeno? That is a question worth pondering, though we lack the evidence to give it a definite answer. I will return to it in the discussion of Arcesilaus and his encounters with Aristo.

Aristo, we may suppose, was as committed as Zeno to supporting a Socratic and Cynic lineage for the newly founded Stoa. In his unitary focus on ethics, Aristo could actually claim to be much closer to Socrates and the Cynics than Zeno was professing to be (DL 6.103).[34] As to knowledge and opinion, topics on which Plato's Socrates had had much to say, Aristo staunchly defended Zeno's doctrine concerning the "cognitive impression" against Arcesilaus's attempts to refute it (DL 7.162). According to Cicero, followed much later by the Platonist Numenius, it was Zeno who debated with Arcesilaus, but contemporary sources make Aristo Arcesilaus's main sparring partner.[35] Cicero drew on authors who were so anxious to defend Zeno's authority that they reduced the dissident Aristo to complete insignificance along with Pyrrho (whom Aristo knew well enough to include in his quip about Arcesilaus) and the rebellious Stoic Herillus. Aristo was far from being forgotten, however. He left a mark on all three of the great Roman Stoics. Seneca reported his views on moral education at length.[36] His uncompromising position on the complete "indifference" of all values except moral goodness and badness is echoed in Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius attributed his conversion to philosophy to reading Aristo.[37]

Turning now to Cleanthes, Zeno's appointed successor, we should not assume that he and Aristo were on bad terms. Aristo published an essay *On Zeno's Doctrines* and several books of correspondence with Cleanthes. These works may have been polemical, but they may also have treated points that left Zeno's positions simply
p. 37 unclear or fluid. If we ↳ take the primary axiom of Stoicism to be "only the honorable is good" (*monon to kalon agathon*), then Aristo was a Stoic through and through.

3.3. Cleanthes of Assos (c. 331 or 301–230 BCE)

Cleanthes was an immigrant to Athens from the impressively fortified city of Assos near the location of Troy.[38] Some years before Cleanthes was born, Aristotle spent time at Assos under the patronage of the local ruler Hermias, who had founded a flourishing Platonic school there. This institution was probably no more than a memory for the young Cleanthes to have known, but its famous history may have motivated him to seek his philosophical fortunes in Athens.

His birth year is generally given as 331, but if that were correct, Cleanthes would have been no more than a year or two younger than Zeno, succeeding to the headship of the Stoa at the age of 70, and continuing so for a further 30 years. In all probability Cleanthes first met Zeno when the latter was in his prime and Cleanthes himself was a young student searching for direction. According to anecdotes, Cleanthes was hard up, exceptionally strong (called "a second Heracles") and industrious, but slow-witted. In fact, Cleanthes made major contributions to all topics of Stoicism, writing about the school's doctrines in verse as well as prose. Moreover, Zeno would not have appointed a dullard as his chosen successor; Cleanthes, like Zeno himself, was highly regarded by King Antigonus of Macedonia, who attended his lectures (DL 7.169). Negativity in Cleanthes's biography was probably due to rivalry from his fellow Stoics Aristo and Chrysippus, and because he was not as quick on his feet as they were. In choosing Cleanthes, who had been his amanuensis, to succeed him, Zeno must have been cognizant of the need to defend his own teaching against the redoubtable dialectic of Arcesilaus (with whom Cleanthes seems to have had a cordial relationship, DL 7.171), and to protect the Stoa against further defections.

Cleanthes wrote a substantial number of books. Of first importance were works *On Zeno's Natural Philosophy* and *Interpretations of Heraclitus*.[39] Zeno had set out his physical theory in his best-attested work, *On the Universe*. There he outlined the main tenets of Stoic physics concerning the divine creative fire, "seminal principles," causal determinism, and world conflagration.[40] What Cleanthes chiefly contributed, we can conjecture, were refinements of the details, and confirmation of the system's affinity to the cryptic cosmology advanced by Heraclitus. Cleanthes wrote about time, which was a major topic of Stoic physics, and about perception. He also did seminal work on theology, language, and music. Much of his bibliography covers particular topics that fall under ethics and politics, the last of which, unlike later Stoics, he deemed to be a specific subject of the school curriculum.

Cleanthes has been overshadowed in philosophical history by his voluminous successor Chrysippus. Many snippets of Chrysippus's dry prose have come down to us in quotation by later authors. From a literary perspective, however, it is Cleanthes who stands out as the more accomplished Stoic writer of the Hellenistic
p. 38 period. In his *Hymn ↳ to Zeus* (LS 54I), effectively modeled in style and meter on the hexameter verse of Homer and Hesiod, Cleanthes praises the Stoics' principal divinity and world creator.[41] He also prays on behalf of himself and his listeners for enlightenment in adherence to the righteous divine law. Some early Greek philosophers had composed in hexameter verse, but by this date those who used this form, such as the Cynic Crates and the Pyrrhonist Timon, did so mainly in parody of the epic tradition. Cleanthes was exceptional in using verse for serious exposition of doctrine. He described poetry as the proper medium for expressing the truths of theology (*SVF* 1.486). He also used it memorably in a further prayer for guidance on how to comply willingly with the predestined course of his life (LS 62B).

3.4. Chrysippus (c. 280–206 BCE)

Chrysippus has not entered popular imagination like such ancient philosophers as Pythagoras, Socrates, and Diogenes, but in his contribution to the Stoic tradition he stands comparison with Plato and Aristotle as a world-class philosopher. Numerous busts representing his face and torso have survived, and it was common for Stoics of the Roman Empire to keep a figurine of Chrysippus in their homes.

He began his life in Soli or its more famous neighboring city Tarsus, continuing the tradition for Stoic philosophers to originate from the Eastern Mediterranean region.[42] There are few reliable details concerning his early life and character. He studied initially with Cleanthes at Athens but broke off his time in the Stoa in order to study in the Academy with the now elderly Arcesilaus and his successor Lacydes (DL 7.183). Under their training, Chrysippus honed his skills as a debater, learning to make powerful arguments on both sides of a thesis. When he left the Academy, he appears to have started teaching in the Odeon at the foot of the Acropolis, and we also hear of his giving lectures in the Lyceum, the meeting place of the Peripatetics. Within a short time, he must have repaired his relationship with Cleanthes, who chose him as his successor to head the Stoa. Anecdotes about Chrysippus have him speak defensively and respectfully about his predecessor, but later Stoics acknowledged differences between them.[43]

If there were any continuing doubts about the future success and direction of the Stoa, Chrysippus put paid to them. Without him, it came to be said, there would have been no Stoa. The compliment acknowledged Chrysippus's prodigious intellectual energy, but it unduly minimized the achievements of Cleanthes and especially Zeno, whose name is frequently linked with that of Chrysippus in summaries of Stoic doctrine. With reference to both his predecessors, he was reputed as saying: "Tell me the doctrines, and I will discover the proofs" (DL 7.179). The incomplete catalog of his writings runs to over a hundred and 60 titles. Most of these works were treatments of logic, especially arguments with conditional premises, and famous dialectical puzzles like the liar paradox. There is also ample evidence of his work in the areas of epistemology and ethics, and he wrote copiously on Stoic physics. Some of Chrysippus's works were addressed to a person named Zeno

p. 39 (not necessarily the Stoic founder), and ↳ he wrote a book *Responding to the Method of Arcesilaus* (DL 7.198). No title refers to Aristo or Cleanthes.

Carneades complimented Chrysippus with a parody of the quip about his indispensability, saying that without Chrysippus, there would have been no Carneades (DL 4.62). The two men were too different in age to have encountered one another in the flesh. What the parody acknowledged was the achievement of Chrysippus in bolstering the Stoa against challenges from his contemporary Academics, thereby requiring Carneades to devote much of his life to targeting Stoic doctrines.[44]

Much of our first-hand evidence for Chrysippus's specific ideas reaches us through hostile writers from the Roman Imperial period, especially Plutarch and Galen. Their philosophical sympathies were with doctrinal Platonism. Plutarch charged Chrysippus with frequently contradicting himself and philosophizing "contrary to common conceptions." Galen focused criticism on Chrysippus's philosophy of mind and moral psychology. By their day, Stoicism had lost its impetus as a vibrant center of original thought, but their criticism is a clear acknowledgment that Chrysippus was the school's supreme authority. As late as the second century CE, students of Stoicism continued to read his technical books on logic. None of his works seems to have survived into late antiquity, but their influence persisted in the Platonist and Aristotelian circles of those years.

4. The Hellenistic Academy

4.1. Arcesilaus of Pitane (c. 315–240 BCE)

Philosophy in Athens during the middle years of the third century BCE was dominated by Arcesilaus, who led the Academy after the long headship of Polemo and the brief succession of Crates (not the famous Cynic teacher of Zeno).[45] Contemporary sources connect Arcesilaus with the names of every philosopher of note at that time, including Stoics, Epicureans, Peripatetics, and Pyrrhonists. He presided over the Academy at the time when Zeno, Aristo, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus were consolidating the Stoa's identity as a fully-fledged teaching institution that could rival and possibly supplant the older schools.

Arcesilaus's name has come down as the founder of the so-called Middle Academy intermediate between the school he took over from Polemo and Crates and the New Academy inaugurated by his successor Lacydes. These terms, Middle and New, have no contemporary authority, however. They were introduced some two hundred years later by self-described Academics, principally Antiochus of Ascalon, who judged Arcesilaus and his successors to have inaugurated a radical and unwarranted shift in the Academy's profile from doctrinal Platonism to thoroughgoing skepticism.[46] What this shift amounted to, or was taken to signify, will be a topic later in this book. For now, we need to note three points about it.

p. 40 First, there is no reliable evidence to show that Arcesilaus laid claim to have introduced a revolution in the Academy's stance. We can suppose that he took himself to be an authoritative spokesperson concerning the issues explored in Plato's dialogues. Rather than looking for "unwritten doctrines," as Speusippus and Xenocrates had done, Arcesilaus probably focused on Plato's published works, interpreting them as exploratory exercises and not as sources of Platonism or conclusive doctrine.

Second, unlike these predecessors, Arcesilaus practiced as an entirely oral philosopher. In this regard, he had Socrates as his principal model. He was probably also keenly aware of Plato's having reputedly said that there could be no written account of his own (Platonic) philosophy.[47]

The third point to keep in mind is that neither Polemo nor Crates has left any doctrinal record or bibliography comparable to Speusippus and Xenocrates, who were assiduous writers and system builders. Polemo seems to have foreshadowed Arcesilaus in focusing the Academy on training his students in philosophical argument (DL

4.19) and the cultivation of a morally consistent character (DL 4.18). In this way he could focus the Academy on Socrates's Platonic persona and emphasize the school's difference from the scientific profile of Aristotle's Peripatos. Arcesilaus would hardly have been appointed to head the Academy if his "skeptical" leanings were a sudden and unwelcome change of philosophical posture.[48] In all likelihood, Polemo had already supported Arcesilaus in this stance. As this book will explain later, Arcesilaus's "skepticism" was primarily directed against Stoicism, especially its claim that empirical knowledge can be guaranteed by the so-called cognitive impression. Polemo had likely encouraged Arcesilaus in this venture with a view to protecting the Academy's distinction as the primary Socratic school and resisting Zeno's appropriation of Socrates into the Stoa.

Arcesilaus spent his first years at Pitane, a small Greek settlement on the Ionian coast, about a hundred miles south of Teos, and to the east of the islands of Lesbos and Chios. The area was controlled by the rulers of Pergamum, whose King Eumenes supported Arcesilaus during his career at Athens. He had an unusually diversified education, beginning at Pitane with Autolycus, a notable astronomer. With his family's help, he continued his studies at Athens, being taught there by a musician and a geometer. After a brief attendance at Theophrastus's lectures, he moved on to the Academy, where he developed a strong personal relationship with the philosopher Crantor and moved in with him. With Polemo and Crates too, Arcesilaus forged close bonds. As their junior by about 20 years, he seems to have been their special protégée, while he in turn called the three of them "gods or vestiges of the golden age" (DL 4.22). His own high standing is evident from the long and laudatory biography of Diogenes Laertius for which his main source was the near contemporaneous life composed by Antigonus Carystus.

In some accounts, Arcesilaus and Zeno are presented as competitive and fellow students of Polemo, but this cannot be right. Zeno was about 20 years older than Arcesilaus. The probability is that Zeno and Arcesilaus became strongly connected in the period 290–270 BCE after Zeno had already made his name as the founder of the Stoic school. At that time, we can infer, the young Arcesilaus, as a leading member of the Academy, viewed
p. 41 Zeno's success as a strong threat to the survival of his own illustrious ↳ school. Sources from the period of Cicero and later report keen debates between Zeno and Arcesilaus concerning the cogency of Stoic epistemology (see Allen, this volume). Yet sources closer to their actual time, as we have seen, present the Stoic Aristo, rather than Zeno, as Arcesilaus's Stoic combatant. In all likelihood, Arcesilaus took on both Stoics. What matters for this book is not so much the identity of Arcesilaus's Stoic opponents as the arguments and issues at stake on both sides.[49]

Arcesilaus's principal strategy in debate was to induce *epochê*, suspension of judgment, by showing that any thesis he was offered could be challenged by an equally strong argument on the opposite side. He was so effective in this project that Chrysippus, who would become the third head of the Stoa, abandoned his early studies with Cleanthes and enrolled for a while at the Academy with Arcesilaus, who must at this time (c. 250 BCE) have been fairly elderly.

Was Arcesilaus a creative thinker or simply a brilliant controversialist and challenging teacher of philosophical methodology? That question will need substantial investigation later in the book. What should be noted here is his hybrid identity registered, as already mentioned, in Aristo's riveting quip, "Plato in front, Pyrrho in back, Diodorus in the middle." The core of Arcesilaus in this characterization was dialectical acumen, signified by his Diodoran middle. A similar point was made by Timon, the Pyrrhonist, who assigned Menedemus, another celebrated dialectician, to Arcesilaus's heart (DL 4.33). Aristo's Arcesilaus is a superficial Platonist, but by means of dialectic and destructive argument he ends up like Pyrrho, with no substantive views or opinions.

The Pyrrhonean persona was still sticking to Arcesilaus three centuries later when Pyrrhonism was revived and refashioned, causing the skeptics of that time to disown Arcesilaus as a dogmatist.[50] Here is how Diogenes Laertius (4.37) describes Arcesilaus:

> He was exceptionally adept at countering objections or bringing the discussion back to its starting point, and adapting it to every occasion. His powers of persuasion were unsurpassed. This drew even more students to his school, though they were terrified by his sharpness. But they bore all this gladly, since his goodness was extraordinary, and he inspired his students with hopes.

Arcesilaus's challenges to Stoicism were not confined to epistemology. They extended to ethics, physics, and probably logic as well. Beyond Stoic and Academic circles, he and his followers came to be typecast as "those who suspend judgment about everything" (LS 68H). The next generations of Academics under the leadership of Lacydes, Carneades, and Clitomachus wore this description as their badge of honor.

Arcesilaus, it has sometimes been supposed, was a systematic Platonist at heart, like Xenocrates, the teacher of Polemo. There is no reason, however, to think that his disavowal of the possibility of knowledge was insincere or in any way qualified, or that he had substantive views on other philosophical topics. What is worth pondering is how he conducted himself within the Academy as distinct from his dialectical encounters with those outside. Diogenes Laertius (4.32) says, "He seems to have admired Plato and he owned Plato's books."
p. 42 What lies behind this rather bland statement? Some of "Plato's ↳ books," meaning the works that have come down to us under Plato's name, are inauthentic dialogues composed in imitation of the genuine works. These spurious books probably date from Arcesilaus's time in the Academy. It is tempting to think that he encouraged his students to write "Platonic dialogues" as philosophical exercises, and that some of them have been transmitted under Plato's name.

Another point to ponder is a difference between Zeno and Arcesilaus in the way they conceived of their cultural role as philosophers. By choosing the Stoa as his official location, Zeno took on a public role in the life of Athens. His biography attests to that in various ways, especially in the many honors he was accorded at the end of his life, in the offer of Athenian citizenship (which he declined), and in the overtures that King Antigonus made soliciting his support. He seems to have encouraged his students to participate in politics. Arcesilaus, we are told, declined to meet the king, and "spent all his time in the Academy avoiding public life" (DL 4.39). Stoicism, as the years went by, infiltrated high culture, especially when it migrated to Rome. Arcesilaus, it seems, had no such ambition for the Platonic tradition, and "academic," unlike "stoic" has not become a word for a type of character and outlook. Unbeknown to Arcesilaus, however, and much to his credit, we continue to have skeptics and, though all too rarely, to value skepticism.

4.2. Carneades (c. 213–128 BCE) and Clitomachus (c. 187–110 BCE)

The fortunes of the Academy in the first decades after the death of Arcesilaus are not well documented. Thanks to Chrysippus, the Stoa had become the dominant Athenian school by the end of the third century. Challenges to its doctrines from the Academic Lacydes of Cyrene, the successor of Arcesilaus, no doubt continued; but Chrysippus, who had studied with both philosophers in his youth, tackled them so effectively that they have left no record in the evidence on the Academy's achievements in that period. Lacydes, however, made enough impression to be reputed the founder of the New Academy.[51] He also had a garden named after him. The figures who took over the school from him—Telecles, Evander, and Hegesinus—are little more than names to us.[52] This quiet period was to end with the appointment of Carneades as head of the Academy in about 160 BCE.

Like Lacydes, Carneades was a North African Greek from the great city of Cyrene, which formed part of the Egyptian domain of the Ptolemies, and like Arcesilaus he made his name especially as a formidable critic of Stoic doctrines. His biography in Diogenes Laertius (4.62) is scanty on reliable details, but we can believe its report that he studied the works of Chrysippus assiduously. Carneades's expertise in Stoic doctrine is well documented by Cicero and later sources. Diogenes Laertius (4.62–3) provided the following portrait of Carneades:

> The man's devotion to work was without parallel, though he was less assiduous in physics than in ethics. Hence he would let his hair and nails grow long from devotion ↳ to his studies. He was so strong in philosophy that even the rhetoricians would dismiss their classes and go to hear him lecture. He had an extremely loud voice.

p. 43

Dialectical ability was no doubt the primary reason for Carneades's being elected to head the Academy at about the age of 55. The contemporary Stoic leaders, Diogenes and Antipater, were forced to take serious note of his arguments, and to attempt to shore up the school's official doctrines in ethics at points where Carneades's criticisms had struck home.[53] As will be seen later in this volume, he not only supported the skeptical stance of Arcesilaus against Stoic epistemology, but also marshaled pro and contra arguments on many other topics with a view to discouraging assent to either side.[54] Some of his counter arguments are so good that they have tempted scholars to interpret them as a form of mitigated skepticism or probabilism.

In the year 155 BCE, Carneades was sent on an embassy to Rome along with Diogenes of Babylon, head of the Stoa, and Critolaus of Phaselis, head of the Peripatos (see note 3). On this occasion, Carneades made a great impression by arguing pro justice on one day and contra justice the day after, as reported by Cicero in his fragmentary work *De republica*. Carneades's performance did not encourage the conservative Roman authorities to support philosophical schools in Rome, but he succeeded in persuading the Roman senate to rescind a fine that had been imposed against Athens.

In 137 BCE, Carneades retired from headship of the Academy owing to ill health. His retirement seems to have left the school in some disarray for the next few years.[55] The names of three successors to him are recorded, but it was only Clitomachus, the third of these men, who made a significant mark. Like Lacydes and Carneades, Clitomachus came from North Africa, in his case from Carthage, where, we are told, he began teaching in his native tongue.[56] (His original name was Hasdrubal.) According to Diogenes Laertius (4.67), Clitomachus was in his fortieth year when he moved to Athens—a round figure that would reflect the fact that Carthage was sacked by the Romans in 146 BCE—and was then taken under Carneades's wing. More probably, Clitomachus arrived in Athens as a much younger man, in order to study with Carneades. After Carneades's retirement, rather than remaining in the Academy, Clitomachus began teaching in another part of the city. In due course, seemingly with strong support from his students, he returned to the Academy and took over the school.[57]

He was a prolific writer (DL 4.67), chiefly celebrated for his record and accurate interpretation of Carneades's oral teaching. These works included a treatise in four books *On Suspension of Judgment* and a treatment of difficulties concerning Carneades's notion of plausible impressions (*pithanai phantasiai*) that are reliable enough to guide action, though not such as to warrant assent concerning their objective truth.[58] Carneades's associates had been in disagreement about the master's position on the question of whether Academics could ever commit themselves to definite opinions (see Bett, this volume). Clitomachus maintained against Philo of Larissa and Metrodorus of Stratonicea that Carneades's apparent endorsement of plausible impressions was never intended as a commitment to their objective veracity; it was merely a tactical move in his response to the Stoic criticism that skepticism makes action impossible.[59]

p. 44 The accounts of Carneades's arguments in Cicero explicitly derive from works of Clitomachus, and we can assume that Sextus Empiricus drew from him his detailed account of Carneades's "plausible impressions." Sextus regularly couples Clitomachus's name with that of Carneades as if the two figures represented a completely unitary philosophy.[60] No original arguments by Clitomachus himself have been transmitted. He was seemingly content in his main writings to act as Carneades's amanuensis, and to defend the hardline skepticism that had been the Academy's hallmark since the time of Arcesilaus.

If this devotion to Carneades makes Clitomachus appear an uninteresting acolyte, that assessment would be too severe. Carneades in intellect and demeanor had been quite extraordinary, nothing less than Herculean (according to Clitomachus himself) in his successful defense of rigorous skepticism.[61] Not unlike Socrates (also

an oral philosopher), Carneades had overshadowed all his companions and successfully rebutted all challenges to skepticism—but only during his lifetime. It was Clitomachus who carried Carneades's legacy forward into a period when other prominent members of the Academy were eager to modify the school's direction (see Sedley, this volume). And he managed to hold its skeptical course steady until his death in the year 110 BCE.

Clitomachus also publicized Carneades's philosophy and name by dedicating one of his works to the celebrated Roman satirist Lucilius and another work to L. Marcus Censorinus, who had been consul in 149 BCE.[62] This outreach is a telling illustration of how Hellenistic philosophy was beginning to migrate from Athens into the western Mediterranean world.

Notes

1. The Greek term *skeptikos* came into vogue at the end of the Hellenistic period when Pyrrhonism was constituted as a new school; see Schwab, this volume.

2. See Sharples 1999.

3. As recounted by Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 6.14.8.

4. For discussion, see the references to them in Algra et al.

5. DL 9.61 –108 is the main source for Pyrrho's life and philosophy. The best study of his work and its legacy is Bett 2000. See also Schwab, this volume.

6. Brunschwig 1993 gives a brilliant account of Anaxarchus's career during his time with Alexander and later.

7. See Bett 2000, 169– 78, on "Pyrrho and the Indians."

8. DL 9.109– 16 gives the main evidence for Timon's life and career. For his role in publicizing and eulogizing Pyrrho, see Long 1978, which includes discussion of the affinities to Cynic themes. Di Marco 1989 is the standard edition of Timon's Lampoons, some of which are translated in LS, vol. 1, 22– 4.

9. DL 9.64, 4.33. For Pyrrho's possible influence on Arcesilaus, see Sedley 1983, 14– 16, and Bett 2000, 190– 1.

10. Cicero, *Fin.* 2.35, *Off.* 1.6, Sextus Epicurus, *PH* 1.7.

11. For details, see Clay 2009; for a sketch of the city, showing the location of the schools, see LS, vol. 1, 4.

p. 45 12. On Nausiphanes, see Warren 2002.

13. See Sedley 1976b for interpretation of Epicurus's reported slurs on his contemporary rivals.

14. See Sedley 1976a.

15. See Sedley 1974.

16. Diogenes Laertius's account of Epicurus's life, which occupies his entire Book 10, is exceptional in giving a pro and contra assessment of the man, and its inclusion of the four works mentioned above.

17. See Sedley 1973 and 2018. Epicurus wrote books *Against the Megarians*, *Against the Physicists* (probably referring to the Presocratics in general), and *Against Theophrastus*. Metrodorus followed suit with books *Against Democritus, Sophists, and Dialecticians*, and Hermarchus wrote *Against Plato* and *Against Aristotle*. Plato's dialogues, including the figure of Socrates, were an ongoing target of Epicurean philosophers; see Kleve 1983.

18. See Frischer 1982 and Zanker 1995.

19. DL 7.1 –160, the longest of all the *Lives*, includes a detailed summary of Stoic philosophy with sources ranging from Zeno to Hecataeus in the first century BCE. For modern treatments of Zeno's life, see Caizzi 1993, the studies in Scaltsas 2002,

and Long 2018a.

20. See Schofield 1991 and Long 2018.

21. See DL 2.113 –20 on the life of Stilpo, and Sedley 1977 on the philosophy and influence of Diodorus.

22. Castagnoli, this volume; Crivelli, this volume.

23. See Long 2018a, 245ff. for different assessments of Polemo's formative influence.

24. All translations are my own.

25. See Wynne, this volume.

26. See DL 7.160– 7.

27. See DL 7.36, 177– 8.

28. See Schofield 1983.

29. The surviving fragments are collected in Pearson 1891 and in *SVF*, vol. 1.

30. See Allen, this volume; Bett, this volume; Klein, this volume.

31. See DL 7. 160– 4, *SVF* 1, 75– 90, and Ioppolo 1980.

32. The original (*Iliad* 6.181) runs: "Lion in front, snake in the back, she-goat in the middle."

33. Cicero repeatedly pairs Aristo with Pyrrho, treating both of them as bygone figures of no current interest, e.g., *Acad*. 2.130, *Fin.* 2.43, 4.60, 5.23. His disparaging comments reflect later Stoics' desire to maintain Zeno's unchallengeable authority; see Long 2018a.

34. See Long 1988, 164– 71.

35. See Long 1986.

36. *Moral Letter* 94.

37. On the presence of Aristo's doctrines in Epictetus, see Long 2002, 202. For Marcus on Aristo, see van Ackeren, 72.

38. See DL 7. 168 –76, *SVF* 1. 103– 39, and Pearson 1891.

39. See Long 1975/6.

40. See Long 2018b. See also Salles, this volume.

41. See Thom 2005.

42. See DL 7. 179 –200, and *SVF*, vol. 2 for Chrysippus's biography and doctrines. The Laertian life breaks off in our MSS amid Diogenes's catalog of Chrysippus's enormous bibliography.

43. *SVF* 3, p. 257.

44. For Chrysippus's effectiveness in defending Stoicism, see Plutarch, *De communibus notitiis* 1059b.

p. 46 45. The main evidence for his life is DL 4. 28– 45. Long 1986 and Long 2006 give a modern account. The ancient sources on his philosophy are collected in Vezzoli 2016, and more briefly in LS 68– 9.

46. See Cicero, *Academica* 1.13– 14.

47. See also Cicero, *Academica* 1.45– 6.

48. The designated successor of Crates had been a man called Socratides, "who withdrew in favor of Arcesilaus" (DL 4.32). Since succession was generally by seniority, we may suppose that Socratides thought that the younger Arcesilaus was

better qualified to lead the school in its debates with Stoic philosophers. There is no mention of Socratides in DL's life of Crates.

49. See Ioppolo 1986.

50. See Sextus Empiricus *PH* 1.232– 4. Whether Arcesilaus himself acknowledged Pyrrho is unclear; see Sedley 1983 and Bett 2000, 190– 1.

51. DL 4. 59– 61.

52. Algra et al., 32 –3.

53. See Long 1967 and LS 64.

54. See Bett, this volume.

55. See Algra et al., 33.

56. DL 4. 67. For further biographical details on Clitomachus, see Algra et al., 33– 4.

57. Details in Dorandi 1991, 196.

58. See Cicero, *Academica* 2.98 and 102 with discussion by Lévy 2010.

59. Cicero, *Academica* 1.78.

60. See Sextus, *PH* 1.3, 220, 230; *M* 9.1, 182.

61. Cicero, ibid. 108.

62. Cicero, ibid. 102. Clitomachus was hardly an established philosopher at that time, so his connection with the eminent Censorinus must post date the latter's consulship by many years.

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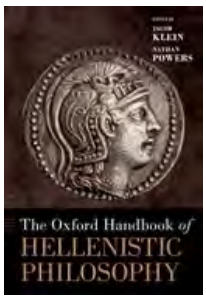
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CHAPTER

2 Our Sources for Hellenistic Philosophy

Stephen White

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Abstract

This chapter surveys the ancient texts and authors that are the primary sources for our knowledge and study of Hellenistic philosophy. Surviving writings of Hellenistic philosophers, which are few and mostly fragmentary, are briefly reviewed. Major later sources are introduced chronologically in four stages, highlighting the diverse philosophical and literary agendas and affiliations that shape and inform both their reports or "testimony" and the "fragments" of Epicurean, Stoic, and other writings they record or paraphrase. The role of dialogue, doxography, and related factors of form and function is also noted, as are significant benefits and risks of using modern sourcebooks.

Keywords: dialogue, doxography, Epicurean, fragment, Hellenistic philosophy, papyri, sources, Stoic, testimony

Subject: Classical Philosophy, Philosophy

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Modern study of Hellenistic philosophy is framed by two countervailing features of the ancient evidence. On the one hand, we have extensive information about the leading philosophers active in the two centuries or so after Aristotle, from roughly 320 to 90 BCE, when conflict with Rome brutally interrupted Athens's long reign as philosophy's capital city.[1] We can read a great deal about what they thought, the questions they asked, the arguments they advanced, the divergent theories they developed, even about the writings which recorded their ideas. On the other hand, very little of that survives in their own words. The vast majority of our evidence is more or less indirect, reported by later writers, some of them working at multiple removes from the original writings. Negotiating these dual constraints—a paucity of original "primary" sources and an abundance of later "secondary" sources—is a fundamental part of studying this period of philosophy, fundamental because those sources are our gateway to its thought and the basis for any critical understanding of it. Yes, there are gaps in the record, silences, obscurities, and inconsistencies, far more than we would like; and no, there is

nothing like Plato's dialogues or Aristotle's treatises to consult in bridging those gaps.[2] Resources are plentiful all the same. As this volume amply illustrates, the sources now available have enabled philosophical scholarship to reconstruct a picture that is panoramic in scope, intricate in detail, and full of fascinating ideas and arguments. Patchy and disparate as our sources are, they reveal an era of vibrant discussion and debate fueled by subtle analysis and brilliant insight.

This chapter serves to introduce the main sources for Hellenistic philosophy. Since the vast majority of these are later writers whose reports are shaped by additional factors—their own training, interests, and outlook—much of our evidence is colored, at times significantly, by a veil of reception, even when our sources had direct access to philosophical writings from our period. The problems multiply when their reports are more than secondhand, dependent on other lost intermediaries whose interventions end up woven into what we read. The
p. 50 scholarly endeavor of recovery and reconstruction thus ↳ amounts to a kind of abstract archaeology: excavating available textual sites, identifying traces and pieces of lost originals—the quotations, paraphrases, and summaries commonly called "fragments"—embedded in their adoptive contexts, gauging stratigraphic layers to determine likely courses of transmission, collecting and comparing related evidence from other texts in light of their contexts in turn, analyzing the ensemble to reconstruct its logical contours, then piecing the evidence together to articulate and possibly to replicate the original arguments and ideas.[3] How this task is accomplished is best seen in specimens of scholarship, and elsewhere in this volume. Here we shall instead survey the textual record already excavated, starting with an inventory of the original sources available today in light of what our later sources tell us about what has been lost (§1). Then, after an informal census of the more prominent later sources (§2), we will review those that have contributed the most to our recovery of Hellenistic philosophy, proceeding chronologically in order to indicate some of the ways evolving traditions and later developments color and shape our evidence. Later sources are accordingly introduced in four loosely distinguished stages of transmission and reception: a transitional phase when philosophy learns Latin in the first century BCE (§3); a period of elaboration and expanding influence extending well into the second century CE (§4); a general consolidation of learning in the decades around 200 CE (§5); and finally, the triumph of scholastic Platonism and Christianity in the following centuries (§6). A glance at modern sourcebooks will conclude the tour (§7). Starting at the beginning, then, where do we stand today with the original sources?

1. Original Sources

Two thousand years ago, schools and libraries all around the Mediterranean housed ample collections of Hellenistic philosophy, stocked with works by scores of influential thinkers. As the texts themselves gradually disappeared in later centuries, superseded by other works and no longer recopied, records of the writings still circulated long enough to be transcribed around 200 CE by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (see §4). The bibliographic lists he records provide a snapshot, incomplete but remarkably detailed, of what is lost.[4] His accounts, which cover only leading figures, attest an explosion of philosophical writing in the first generations of our period, and hence a stark picture of later loss (Table 2.1).[5]

Table 2.1 Census of Writings by Leading Hellenistic Philosophers

A. Stoics	**Titles**	**Books**	**B. Epicureans**	**Titles**	**Books**	**C. Skeptics**	**Titles**	**Books**
Zeno	25	30	Epicurus	41	87	**Academics**		
Cleanthes	50	60	Associates	34	64	Clitomachus	3+	“400”
Chrysippus	217+	“705”	Apollodorus	4+	“400”	*Others*	?	?
Associates	81	158	*Others*	20	39	**Pyrrhonians**		
Others	47	85	*Philodemus*	21	61	Timon	6	8
Posidonius	29	108				*Aenesidemus*	3	10
A Total	**449**	**1146**	**B Total**	**120**	**661**	**C Total**	**12**	**418**
			Total ABC	**581**	**2225**			

Diogenes discusses eight early Stoics and provides a list of their writings in every case—Zeno, Cleanthes, five of their associates, and Chrysippus—noting for each larger work its number of "books" (rolls of papyrus, comparable to substantial articles or chapters, as in Aristotle's surviving treatises). The list for Chrysippus is organized systematically by field and topic; even in its truncated state, it lists over 160 titles filling over 400 books on logic and ethics (7.189–202); missing some sections on ethics and the physics section entirely, it falls short of the total of "705 books" Diogenes cites to indicate the philosopher's sedulity (7.180).[6] Nevertheless, for
p. 51 the first generations of Stoics ↳ alone, our very partial record totals over 370 titles in over 950 books. Even in the absence of comparable records for any later Stoics, scattered citations add over 70 more titles comprising nearly 200 books from the next century and a half.

Records for other philosophers, though spottier, nearly double the total of books. Epicurus stands out, reportedly "surpassing everyone in abundance of books: nearly 300 rolls" (10.26). A list explicitly limited to his "best" works names over 40 titles in twice as many books (10.27). Evidently, his associates were less prolific, though even our meager evidence for them yields over 30 titles, and a single head of his school in the second century BCE, Apollodorus "the Garden Tyrant," added "over 400 books" single-handedly (10.25). Academic skeptics contributed a fair share too. It might be unsurprising that Arcesilaus and Carneades, as leading proponents of withholding assent, refrained from writing (4.32, 4.65; cf. Philodemus, *Acad*. cols. 18 and 32–3); but some of their associates responded differently, notably Clitomachus, who produced "over 400 books" that gave Carneades's ideas "the light of day" (DL 4.67), informing much of Cicero's work, for example. In the third century, Timon, as chief publicist for Pyrrho's ideas, similarly shaped the Pyrrhonian legacy by articulating a distinctive skeptical attitude in multiple works; his snappy verse caricatures of predecessors and contemporaries, for example, earned his *Lampoons* a partial reprieve from oblivion (9.110–11).[7] A full inventory of known losses would include still more philosophers, certainly several Peripatetics who participated actively in ongoing disputes, and whose proposals and reactions figure importantly in reports about our three main traditions. Yet even a tally limited to leading figures in the new Hellenistic schools and movements yields a grand total approaching 600 titles and well over 2,000 books. That is a huge body of work by any standard; and almost none of it survives fully in its original form.

Even this partial inventory, limited as it is to what surviving lists and citations record, makes all too clear the enormous scale of loss. Its full extent is of course incalculable. In addition to recognized gaps in the evidence for major figures and their associates, a census of the many others known to have been active in philosophy
p. 52 during our period ↳ exposes more gaping holes. The newly completed *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, which catalogs nearly 3,000 philosophers across 12 centuries of antiquity (600 BCE–600 CE), assigns over 500 to our period: over 130 Stoics, 120 Academics, 90 Epicureans, along with 60 Peripatetics and 10 Pyrrhonians active in the third and second centuries BCE alone;[8] and that does not even count major figures, such as Posidonius, Philodemus, Antiochus, or Aenesidemus, from the first century BCE. Even if our census captures everyone who contributed "original" ideas or arguments, as it almost certainly does not, it omits countless more whose teaching and writing played essential supporting roles in the exposition and wider circulation of ideas.

The scale of this loss is staggering. No complete work by any leading Hellenistic philosopher has reached us directly on its own, not one. Yet fortune has been much kinder than our tallies so far allow. Much of their thought has in fact survived, albeit via more or less circuitous routes, and there is still plenty to study and ponder, including original writings transcribed by later sources. A few works even survive complete, copied into later works, and parts of many more have been recovered, some excerpted or paraphrased by later writers, and portions of still others preserved on ancient papyrus or stone. For complete or substantial writings, the harvest is curiously lopsided, heavily favoring Epicurus and his followers. From other schools, the most substantial survivals to date are some moralizing harangues by an otherwise unknown Cynic from the third century named Teles, a short "Hymn to Zeus" by Cleanthes sketching a Stoic theodicy, papyrus scraps of logical studies by Chrysippus, and snatches of honorific verse, including the only known writing by Arcesilaus (DL 4.30–1), which supply cultural and historical backlight but no philosophical substance.[9]

Substantial portions of Epicurean works survive in a spectacular cache of papyrus rolls recovered from a Roman villa at Herculaneum that Mt. Vesuvius buried under volcanic ash when it erupted in 79 CE. Thousands of rolls formed what had evidently been the working library of the Epicurean Philodemus of Gadara (c. 110–'30s BCE), who had studied in Athens before settling on the bay of Naples around 80 BCE.[10] Despite repeated calamities—the eruption's devastation, excavators in the 1750s mistaking carbonized rolls for lumps of coal, many clumsy attempts to unravel the rolls—the remains of what is the only ancient library yet uncovered still comprise hundreds of fragmentary texts already transcribed and edited, another 280 rolls still unopened, and potentially more to be found on site. Identified works form three main blocks, all Epicurean, along with a smattering of Stoic and Latin material. The heart of the collection is Epicurus's magnum opus *On Nature*, which ran to 37 books: parts of at least eight have been recovered, some in multiple copies.[11] Another block preserves portions of works by Epicurus's leading followers, both early associates like Metrodorus and Colotes, and prominent later figures like Demetrius of Laconia (c. 150–?) and Zeno of Sidon (c. 150–'70s BCE). The largest block comes from Philodemus himself: nearly 100 rolls now identified, many heavily indebted to his teacher Zeno, and ranging widely over epistemology (*On Sign Inference*), rhetoric (*On Rhetoric*), poetry (*On Poets*, *On Music*), religion (*On Gods*, *On Piety*), and especially ethics, with treatises *On Characters and Lives* (parts of four
p. 53 books), *On Vices and the Opposing Virtues* (parts of four more), *On Death*, and more. ↳ His *Register of Philosophers*, which recounted the discipline's history as a series of brief professional biographies for its several traditions and schools (probably in 10 books), is a crucial historical source; recovered sections on the Academy and Stoics provide data on dates and personal connections that anchor the chronological framework for the entire period.[12]

Philosophers also turn up in public documents inscribed on stone, typically recognizing some sort of public service, occasionally their teaching. Leading Academics and Peripatetics were so honored in Athens, the Stoic Panaetius both there and on his native Rhodes, others elsewhere around the Aegean.[13] Numerous memorial busts, some based on honorific statues, also survive in Roman copies.[14] The Epicureans stand out for other solid evidence too, and spectacularly so with a monumental display of texts inscribed on a stone portico in the town of Oenoanda in southwest Turkey (ancient Lycia). Erected c. 130 CE, apparently at the initiative of a prominent citizen named Diogenes of Oenoanda, the original inscription evidently occupied over 250 square meters of wall surface, displayed in multiple courses standing over three meters tall.[15] Recovered portions preserve parts of more lost writings by Epicurus, including letters to his mother and colleagues, alongside tracts on physics, ethics, and related topics, which (absent compelling alternatives) are standardly attributed to the portico's dedicator, Diogenes.

The only substantial works that survive complete come again from Epicurus, all transcribed by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives* and accordingly fairly short. In addition to the philosopher's will, an illuminating cameo of his inner circle and philosophical practice (10.16–22), Diogenes records four works in their entirety, three written as encyclical letters to groups of followers.[16] The richest, *To Herodotus*, presents a methodical synopsis of physics from atomic principles to the mechanics of perception and psychology (10.35–83). Another, *To Pythocles*, demonstrates his method of multiple explanations for remote phenomena, both celestial and atmospheric, cast as an antidote to fear of the gods (10.84–116). The third one, *To Menoeceus*, presents a polished précis of his "sober" brand of hedonism, highlighting its "fourfold cure" as the path to "peace of mind" and living like a god (10.122–35). All three are explicitly cast as summaries of views elaborated at length elsewhere: streamlined "epitomes" or digests designed for study and synoptic review by followers and students. The shortest, *To Menoeceus*, is incisively argumentative: a series of basic theses supported by punchy, almost tabular reasoning. The other two, though wider ranging and richer in detail, condense many points to bald assertion, shorn of the expansive elaboration of objections and rejoinders we find in portions of *On Nature*. The fourth work serves as "capstone" to the philosopher's "Life" and thereby the entire volume of *Lives* (10.139–54): a collection of 40 short excerpts from his writings arranged as a catechism of *Key Doctrines* (*Kuriai Doxai*), starting with the basic "fourfold cure" (*KD* 1–4). Its contents overlap with a larger collection of 81 excerpts, called *Vatican Sayings* after the library that houses the sole surviving manuscript.

As our survey indicates, the original sources now available have reached us by tortuous routes, either fortuitously recovered from sites obliterated long ago, or selectively copied by much later writers—Epicurus by
p. 54 Diogenes Laertius after five centuries ↳ (§5), Cleanthes by John Stobaeus after seven (§6). Aside from some strips of papyrus, every Hellenistic text postdates the period one way or another. How our few complete "originals" managed to survive may not affect their interpretation directly. But when our access to Hellenistic philosophy as a whole otherwise depends entirely on reports by later writers, then the paths of transmission that affect what was studied and survived matter for assessing the testimony of those sources. Negotiating this veil of reception calls for multiple critical strategies: not only collecting related evidence, but also weighing the reliability of each report in its textual and historical contexts, and assessing its coherence with other evidence. Just as the context surrounding a given passage can reveal misunderstanding or misrepresentation even for verbatim quotations, so attention to the wider contexts of a writer's background, allegiances, or agenda, or to the format of his work or its target audience, affords us some control on biases and distortions in our sources, intentional or not. Another factor here, and one rationale for proceeding chronologically in our survey, is simply the chain of testimony: tracking which sources had direct access to original material, and what factors mediated or informed the access they had.[17]

2. Later Sources

Ancient texts, written on rolls of papyrus, survived for generations only if recopied repeatedly, and older works suffered continual winnowing as needs and interests shifted and evolved among the reading public, philosophers, their students, and others as well. This process of intellectual selection was accelerated by broader cultural factors in the centuries following our period, as philosophy rapidly expanded its foothold in Italy, as Romans began transposing Greek writings and ideas into Latin, and as Greeks in turn repackaged philosophy for Italian and provincial elites in an increasingly mixed cultural environment. Rising interest in Plato and Aristotle intensified these trends, which gradually but steadily displaced the Hellenistic "classics" and hastened the demise of our original sources.[18] By the third century CE, a narrowing philosophical curriculum that focused increasingly on Plato and Aristotle combined with the advent of new forms of book production to create a fatal bottleneck for the transmission of texts. Demand for the works we still have today outstripped waning interest even in Hellenistic masterworks enough to choke off the supply chain. To judge by what has survived, few if any of our original sources were copied from aging papyrus rolls onto fresh sheets of parchment to be bound in the "codex" format that evolved into what we call "books" today.[19]

The sources that survived that gauntlet to be read in medieval manuscripts are mainly writers valued for additional reasons, not philosophy alone: model stylists like Cicero and Seneca, the poet Lucretius, Plutarch for his biographies, Galen as the dominant medical authority. Even isolated cases such as Diogenes Laertius and
p. 55 Sextus Empiricus stand at the end of their traditions, surviving on the strength of effective summations.[20] ↳ A thorough inventory of these later sources is impractical. A survey of major contributors, however, can provide a preliminary guide to their various contributions and highlight important factors to consider in handling them and other sources generally. The "principal sources" assembled in LS, for example, comprise over 800 items drawn from around 50 named authors, and a few more anonymous. Most of that harvest comes from only a handful of writers. Four account for more than half of the total (419 of 809), including many passages of any length: Diogenes Laertius, Cicero, Sextus Empiricus, and Plutarch. Another nine provide two-thirds of the rest (261): Stobaeus, Lucretius, Galen, Seneca, Alexander, Simplicius, Epictetus, Eusebius, and Philo (see Table 2.2).[21] Many more contribute valuable reports and information, of course, a few of whom will be noted as we proceed. But before we meet any of them, it will be useful to preview some general differences in approach, format, and orientation that inform their disparate contributions.

Table 2.2 Principal Sources and Their Affiliations (based on frequency in LS)

1. Roman transition: mid-first century BCE (§3)
M. T. Cicero (Roman)—statesman, Academic
T. Lucretius (Roman)—poet, Epicurean
2. Imperial developments: first/second century CE (§4)
Philo of Alexandria (Greek)—Jewish theologian
L. A. Seneca (Roman)—statesman, Stoic
Plutarch (Greek)—philosopher, Platonist
Epictetus (Greek)—philosopher, Stoic
3. Magisterial summations: 170–230 CE (§5)
Galen of Pergamum (Greek)—physician, Platonizing
Alexander of Aphrodisias (Greek)—philosopher, Aristotelian
Sextus Empiricus (Greek)—physician, Pyrrhonist
Diogenes Laertius (Greek)—historian of philosophy
4. Aftermath: 250–550 CE (§6)
Eusebius (Greek)—Christian bishop
J. Stobaeus (Greek)—anthologist
Simplicius (Greek)—philosopher, Platonist

Language is one obvious difference, though probably less consequential than we might suppose. Recasting Greek ideas into Latin was a momentous achievement, but those who accomplished it were thoroughly bilingual. While Greeks generally resisted writing in a foreign script, Romans did not, as Marcus Aurelius famously demonstrates (§4), and he had plenty of company. More to the point, Greek remained philosophy's primary language throughout antiquity, and at least initially, Romans wrote in their native tongue not to displace Greek models but to reach new audiences, who could then pursue questions further in Greek texts.

Far more important are the *kinds of information* different sources provide. Those that offer systematic discussions naturally loom large: all 10 in our first three stages. Several of these present extensive arguments
p. 56 for and against rival views on various ↳ topics, some as proponents (notably Lucretius and Seneca), others as critics (Plutarch, Sextus, Galen), some juxtaposing arguments pro and con (as Cicero often does). Levels of argument in turn vary considerably, some sources favoring expansive rhetoric over logical or conceptual analysis, others conversely. Some even focus narrowly on conclusions, providing "doxographic" summaries of the diverse "doctrines" or positions (*doxai*) held by various philosophers, stripped of reasoning, explanation, or criticism.[22] Some accounts highlight personal or historical information, how a philosopher lived, his habits, predilections, associates, writings, or other endeavors. In practice, many sources combine disparate information in all sorts of ways, summarizing rival positions to frame arguments, or combining biography with summaries or booklists as Diogenes Laertius does, producing hybrids of "biodoxography" or "biobibliography."[23] We can nonetheless distinguish three broad categories of information: arguments, positions, and people. Most of our main sources focus squarely on issues and arguments. Doxographic summaries, which typically inform other discussions, appear as a special focus in later sources: Diogenes Laertius (organized by school and individual), and Eusebius and Stobaeus, excerpting lost earlier work by Aëtius and Arius Didymus (see §4). Biographical work by Diogenes and Philodemus in his *Register* (§1) provides information about personal interactions and a chronological framework.

An important factor that cuts across these categories is *literary form*, which can affect both initial impact and ultimate survival.[24] Most striking is Lucretius's use of verse, which gained his work a wider audience and lasting impact without sacrificing sustained argument (§3). Just as his rendition of Epicurean theory into elegant verse made it more accessible than the Greek originals—which opponents decried as rebarbative—so Cicero's stylish dialogues among Roman statesmen served to win philosophy much wider Roman interest, an aim he announces in his prologues time and again. In both cases, literary form and finesse promoted circulation, and thereby influence. At the opposite pole to such "popularizing" work stand arid handbooks, which have not survived (except as excerpted, as with Aëtius and Arius Didymus), and at advanced levels studies by Alexander (§5) and Simplicius (§6) writing as professors for their students and fellow philosophers. Differences in literary form thus tend to track another basic divide between works produced for different *audiences*, and accordingly serving different *functions*:

- Public circulation: poetry, dialogues, essays or declamations, epistles
- Professional use: digests (*epitomê*), introductions (*eisagôgê*), lectures (*scholê*), tracts or treatises (*pragmateia*), studies or commentaries (*hupomnêma*)

Unlike the lost Hellenistic originals, which (to judge by our records: cf. §1) primarily served the discipline itself as extensions of philosophical inquiry and teaching, most of the major later sources employ forms designed for wider audiences. Some emulate pre-Hellenistic models of didactic verse and dramatic dialogue: notably our
p. 57 first Romans—Lucretius and Cicero (§3)—and later the Platonist Plutarch (§4). Only in ↳ the last of our four stages, when we encounter Plotinus and his fellow Platonists from Porphyry to Simplicius (§6), do professional philosophers predominate. Few of our major sources before then either made philosophy their vocation or wrote specifically for students and fellow professionals: other than Alexander, only Galen and Plutarch occasionally, and possibly Sextus.[25] Certainly there was no shortage of professional writing before Alexander. Quite the contrary, the two centuries after Cicero were a hothouse for philosophy, with major developments especially in Platonism, which engaged with mainstream Stoicism in newly constructive directions.[26] Little of that work survived, however, and its traces tell us less about its Hellenistic predecessors than vice versa. Top billing on our roster of sources goes instead to writers who were, yes, steeped in philosophy, even philosophically adept, but who had other primary commitments which philosophy supported and supplemented: men of state like Cicero and Seneca; the physician Galen, who maintained that the best doctor had to be a philosopher too; or theologians like Philo and later Christian Fathers deploying philosophy in the service of their religion. As for Diogenes and Stobaeus, their precious compilations afford few clues as to their occupation but again suggest that wider audiences were their target.

This imbalance in our sources handicaps efforts to recover the original forms of Hellenistic philosophy in its full rigor and detail. Yet its continuing vitality through another three centuries or so ensured that key ideas and arguments were continually revisited, and core texts studied and recopied. Our sources do show innovation and revision, especially in Stoicism, and cases of thorough rethinking, but also frequent recycling. Some two centuries out (c. 110 CE), Epictetus can chastise students for parroting Stoic classics and handbooks: “You’re saying only the words you’ve read. Are the words themselves sacred in their own right?” (*Disc*. 3.21.16). Ironically, the partisanship characteristic of this ongoing interest partially compensates for our loss of those professional writings. A source’s *philosophical affiliations* or allegiances can color or distort their reports; they can also enrich those reports by promoting critical discussion and argument. Lucretius writes as an Epicurean evangelist, Seneca as an avowed Stoic; both are expansive in making their cases, also in meeting objections. Not only do the more accessible and popular literary forms facing us reflect a certain survival of the culturally fitting; in many cases, much of what those forms might otherwise suppress, the partisan dialectic preserves and invigorates. Even Plutarch’s professional writings are mostly lost. Effective forms of advocacy, polemic, and apologetics have the distinct advantage of surviving.

The interplay of these several factors of content, form, and affiliation shapes and colors the evidence that forms our record for Hellenistic philosophy. This applies not only to the “testimony” our sources provide—what they report *about* our subject—but also to their selection and handling of any “fragments” of the *original* writings and teachings they preserve: extracts, quotations, titles, or simply attributions by name. However, few general rules apply. Sources must be analyzed and assessed case by case. Adherents of one stance can be fair critics of their opponents’ positions, or not, and fair in one passage but not in another. On a notional scale of objectivity, most of our main sources tend to operate toward the pole of interpretive charity, drifting away depending on
p. 58 topic or ↳ agenda, or on who their opponents are. Sextus, whose Pyrrhonian skepticism opposes the claims of *all* “dogmatists” (his label for any philosopher who is not a Pyrrhonist), is an excellent source in large part because he presents opposing arguments so fully. Similarly, chronology is an unreliable index of reliability. Some of our latest sources provide some of our best evidence because they transcribe or summarize otherwise lost works that predate any or most other sources, as Diogenes does with Epicurus (cf. §1). What counts is not temporal proximity to the Hellenistic period but access to writings and records of its philosophers, and intellectual integrity in addressing their texts and ideas. With that maxim and our other relevant factors in hand, we shall now survey the main later sources in four chronological stages.

3. Roman Transitions

Our earliest major sources are among the most engaging and astute, at once comprehensive and detailed. As Rome struggled through political turmoil that would culminate in an imperial monarchy under which our later sources wrote, two Romans dramatically advanced philosophy's adoption of a new tongue: a shadowy Lucretius recast Epicurean atomism in stately Latin verse, and the eminent orator and statesman Cicero, an avowed Academic, dramatized major Hellenistic debates in a suite of dialogues featuring fellow Roman nobles. Their efforts not only naturalized alien concepts by deploying paraphrase, coinage, and assimilation over transliteration (the name "*philosophia*" is a striking exception). In creating works of enduring literary power, they also expanded access to their subject and attracted new audiences to it, making philosophy more appealing than its alien originals had by endowing it with distinctly Roman glamour and cultural cachet.[27]

Titus **Lucretius** Carus (c. 95–c. 50 BCE) is known only for the one poem preserved under his name, but what a poem it is, spanning over 7,400 hexameter verses in a methodical sequence of six topically organized "books." Formally addressed to an influential senator, it implicitly directs its case to Roman readers at large, transforming rugged Epicurean Greek into fluent Latin poetry, famously figured as a "honeyed cup" for its wormwood cure (*DRN* 1.926–50 ≈ 4.1–25), and transposing and elaborating abstract arguments with vivid and familiar imagery. Prologues to odd-numbered books, for example, celebrate Epicurus as heroic benefactor (initially a man, then father, finally a god); alternating prologues picture his teaching's benefits. As his title announces, Lucretius focuses squarely on physics: *On the Nature of Things* (*De rerum natura*) evokes both a tradition of philosophical poetry stretching back to Empedocles, and Epicurus's own masterwork *On Nature*, neatly Latinizing its title. Overall the poem presents a sustained argument for the accuracy and explanatory power of Epicurean atomism and empiricism, building from microstructure to cosmology and analyzing human souls and society along the way.[28] The first two books introduce the principles of atoms and void, along
p. 59 with critiques of selected materialist alternatives and detailed treatment of atomic ↳ motion to show how interacting particles shape the observable furniture of our world, and of countless other worlds beyond. The middle two books focus on human psychology, first our soul's atomic nature and mortality, then its sensory and other cognitive capabilities. The final two books widen the lens to survey the world at large, explaining the origin and evolution of our solar system and human culture, then parading solutions to perennial questions about weather and other puzzling phenomena, only to end with a gruesome spectacle of plague in Athens, at once a powerful reminder of human mortality and a test of the converted reader's newfound disdain for death. Notably missing from the main line of argument is any systematic treatment of ethical principles. Instead, the poem weaves its case for austere hedonism into its overall structure and occasional episodes, which include eruptions of rhetoric and pathos. The "fourfold cure" (cf. §1), for example, is evoked repeatedly but never enunciated: worries about death are resolved in Book 3, about gods in Book 6, prospects of pleasure highlighted in prologues, pain assayed in epilogues, all four boxes ticked again and again.

How does the poem stand as a source? Coming right on the heels of our period, Lucretius is thoroughly imbued with Hellenistic material. The question that exercises scholarship is more precise: what exactly does his poem reflect? Does it adhere "faithfully" to the writings of Epicurus himself, or does it incorporate later developments as well, either proposals from other Epicureans or the poet's own responses to critics or rivals? Systematic parallels with the sequence of topics and arguments in Epicurus's synoptic letters *To Herodotus* and *To Pythocles* and in surviving portions of *On Nature* led David Sedley to declare Lucretius a "fundamentalist" who follows the founder uniquely, ignoring subsequent refinements. Others suspect replies to Stoics or other opponents at various points and a more substantive "transformation" of his primary source, whether on his own initiative or following other Epicureans.[29]

From Lucretius we have only one poem. At the opposite pole stands Marcus Tullius **Cicero** (106–43 BCE), whose life is easily the most fully documented in classical antiquity.[30] By his own account, he received a thorough training in philosophy and knew many of the leading lights, including the rival Academics Philo and Antiochus, the Epicurean Phaedrus, and the Stoic Posidonius. After a brilliant career in law and politics, he returned to philosophy vigorously late in life. First, under the first Triumvirate, he charted a renewal of republican government led by an enlightened Senate in a trio of works loosely modeled on Platonic dialogues (55–51 BCE): *On the Orator* (three books), *On the Republic* (six books; only parts survive), and *On Laws* (three books, unfinished).[31] Then, as Julius Caesar consolidated his power after civil war, and in the wake of divorce, remarriage, and his daughter's death, Cicero produced a second and larger spate of philosophical writing, a dozen works in over 25 "books" in under 24 months (45–44 BCE). The result, though short of a complete philosophical curriculum in Latin (cf. *Div*. 2.4), is a remarkably wide-ranging critical survey of the leading positions and arguments on key questions in Hellenistic philosophy, especially ethics, religion, and epistemology.

Designed to make philosophy more appealing to Roman audiences, these late works are again mostly dialogues, though not in the conversational format familiar from Plato's Socratic dialogues, but rather favoring
p. 60 uninterrupted discourse as in the *Timaeus*, ↳ part of which Cicero translated (Sedley 2013). Casual banter among dignified Roman senators (some of them casualties of Caesar's civil war) leads to lengthy disquisitions, typically in pairs, first an exposition of Epicurean or Stoic positions and then a critical response from the perspective of an Academic skeptic. *On the Nature of Gods*, for example, has a Roman Epicurean make a case for his school's positions, partly via criticism of other views, to which a friend delivers an Academic critique; another friend then expounds Stoic views, which the same Academic critic rebuts in turn (Wynne 2019). Sometimes Cicero assigns himself the critic's role: rebutting separate expositions of Epicurean, then Stoic ethical theories in *On Ends*, concluding with a curiously brief rejoinder to a Peripatetic account in Book 5 (Woolf and Inwood 2001); or countering Stoic arguments from his brother Quintus in *On Divination*. This use of opposing speeches melds ancient courtroom procedure with an Academic strategy for inducing suspended judgment by considering arguments "on both sides" of a question. Cicero's mode of presentation is not simply a deferral of authorial authority, but informed specifically by his philosophical allegiances.[32] Other works adopt related Academic strategies, dispensing with the positive case and framing the entire discussion as rejoinders to an initial thesis: *On Fate* (incompletely preserved) to criticize Stoic and Epicurean causal theories, and *Tusculan Disputations* (set at Cicero's Tuscan villa) in five books defending counter-claims about immortality, pain, emotions, and virtue. Two topical dialogues go further and vigorously advocate views *On Friendship* and *On Old Age*, casting renowned statesmen of the previous century as proponents, whence their alternate titles *Laelius* and *Cato*. In his last philosophical composition, *On Duties*, as also in a handbook on *Topics*, Cicero drops all masks and writes directly in his own voice, expounding mainstream Stoic ethics in the former (Woolf 2023) and an Aristotelian theory of argumentation in the latter (Reinhardt 2006).

One other work deserves special mention here: Cicero's *Academics*, or *Academic Books*. As the opening salvo in the second series of dialogues, it articulates the rationale for his approach most fully, providing in the process our most extensive account of Stoic and Academic confrontations in epistemology (Brittain 2006; Reinhardt 2023). It also shows Cicero adapting his use of the dialogue format as he returns to philosophical writing: parts of two very different versions survive, which fall sadly short of a complete whole. A first version in two books (traditionally called *Prior Academics*) portrays Cicero at the height of his influence 20 years earlier responding to elder statesmen since deceased; only the second book, also called *Lucullus* after its Stoicizing proponent, survives. A revised version (hence *Posterior Academics*) had four books; only the beginning of the first one survives, now depicting Cicero responding to his contemporary Marcus Terentius **Varro** (116–27 BCE), whose name again provides its title.[33] The *Varro* is thus *Academics* 1 (superseding a lost *Catulus*), written after the *Lucullus* or *Academics* 2 but logically preceding it in the sequence of argument.

For systematic treatment and continuous argument, Cicero's works have few rivals among our later sources, and his synoptic presentations provide effective introductions to their topics, in many respects the best available for our period. Coming of age as the learning of "captive Greece captured its fierce victor" (Horace,
p. 61 *Epistles* 2.1.156), Cicero ↳ enjoyed the advantages of extensive access to original works (well attested in his letters: McConnell 2014), personal contact with influential voices in the debates he reports, and immunity to most subsequent developments. Yet his very strengths as an independent thinker and cogent writer also put his reliability in question. In the interest of clarity and fluency he often ignores complications and qualifications, or irons out important wrinkles we find in other sources. Like any other evidence, his must be tempered by consideration of available parallels—which he no doubt expected to be readily available for his readers to consult for further study. One of the few cases where we can still do so is the treatment of Epicurean theology in Book 1 of *On the Nature of the Gods*, which closely corresponds with Philodemus *On Piety* (McKirahan 1996; Essler 2011). Especially tantalizing is *On Duties*, where Cicero claims to base his first two books directly on a lost work by the Stoic Panaetius (3.7; Dyck 1996; Brunt 2013). He certainly reworked his model, condensing some parts, elaborating others, making adjustments to suit his own critical judgment throughout (1.6), even going beyond Panaetius to argue in a third book that virtue and expediency are compatible. The resulting amalgam is probably still the closest we have to a complete Hellenistic treatise, reflecting its model in structure, approach, and overall tendency, if not in many details.

4. Imperial Developments

Our evidence for philosophical developments in the decades after Cicero is especially sketchy, and little of the abundant writing that survives from Augustan Rome sheds much light on Hellenistic thought specifically. An important exception is **Philo** of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE–'40s CE), a Greek Jew whose handful of treatises and extensive exegetical writings on the Torah draw heavily on Stoic thought. Outside of *On the Imperishability of the World*, however, he leaves most views he discusses unattributed, which makes parsing his accounts problematic (Alesse 2008). Two major sources appear in the next generations. First, on the Roman side, the Stoic statesman Seneca produced several incisive works in the mid-first century CE; and decades later, the Platonist Plutarch produced an enormous body of work, much of it formally addressed to Roman patrons, or to Greek friends.

Lucius Annaeus **Seneca** (c. 4 BCE–65 CE), whose homonymous father Seneca "the Elder" was a leading rhetorician, was exiled in the '40s CE, recalled to tutor the young Nero in 49 CE, then served as his chief adviser for 55–62 CE, before retiring and writing until directed to end his own life.[34] An exceptionally versatile writer, he authored eight tragedies and an array of treatises and shorter pieces, commonly called "essays" but labeled "discussions" (*dialogi*) in antiquity. Most examine basic ethical questions and elaborate Stoic positions while addressing rival views along the way: shorter treatments *On Peace of Mind*, *On Happiness*, *On Constancy of the Wise*, and the like, with longer works *On Anger*, *On Clemency*, and *On Benefits* (Inwood 2005). Another work,
p. 62 entitled *Natural Questions*, cultivates a perspective of cosmic rationalism by addressing topics ↳ in meteorology and geophysics in eight books, from comets and winds to rivers and earthquakes (Williams 2012). Arguably his masterpiece, and a rich source for our period too, is a large collection of *Letters on Ethics* (Graver and Long 2015; Inwood 2007), all addressed "To Lucilius" as one side of a probably fictive epistolary dialogue encompassing topics from Roman sociology and confessional meditation to metaphysics and epistemology, delivered with an artfully engaging intimacy in a disorderly sequence that charts a moral and intellectual itinerary for a kind of Stoic pilgrim's progress (Griffin 2007).

Plutarch of Chaeronea (c. 45–120s CE), best known today for his "parallel Lives" of famous Greek and Roman leaders, was a major Platonist philosopher, teacher, and scholar whose prolific writings show encyclopedic range. An ancient "table" of his works (supposedly compiled by a putative son named Lamprias) lists over 220 titles, and a still voluminous corpus of surviving writings comprises nearly 50 paired "Lives" and some 70 other works, including dialogues, speeches, epistles, collections of sayings and anecdotes, collectively called his *moralia* or "ethical works" (a Byzantine label, originally for a subset of the corpus), or simply "essays" for his special finesse in that particular format. While engaging in current discussions, many of these confront issues in Hellenistic disputes, some via Stoic and other participants in a dialogue, others directly in critical studies *On Virtue* (Babut 1969), *On the Principle of Cold* (Boys-Stone 1997), and on other topics. Especially valuable are four polemical works. Two of these take the Stoics to task for violating basic norms of human life and reason, including principles they endorse as criteria of truth: *On Stoic Self-Contradictions* for pervasive inconsistency in both theory and conduct (Opsomer 2017); and a dialogue *On Common Conceptions* for radical incoherence in undermining the "shared" understanding of ordinary language on which they claim to rely. Both constantly cite Stoics by name, the former often naming titles as well. A pair of dialogues charge Epicureans with similar inconsistency: *Against Colotes* tracks its target's own polemics step by step, catching the Academic Arcesilaus and Cyrenaic hedonism among several others in its crossfire (Kechagia 2011; Morel 2013); *Against Epicurean Happiness* turns the table on Epicurus, arguing that his hedonism "makes a pleasant life impossible."

Contemporary with Plutarch is another important source, the influential Stoic **Epictetus** ('50s–c.135 CE), a freed slave whose charismatic teaching attracted many young students. A large sample of his instruction is recounted—ostensibly verbatim (*Disc*. Prologue)—by one of those students (c. 110), the future statesman and historian Arrian (c. 86–160 CE), in four books of *Discourses* (*diatribai*) loosely modeled on Xenophon's *Recollections* of Socrates (Carter 1995; Long 2002). References to Hellenistic Stoics show Epictetus's command of authoritative texts and ideas, which he animates throughout by an austere moral intensity.[35] Urging students not to let logical puzzles impede their ethical progress, for example, he provides our fullest account of the famous "Master Argument" (*Disc*. 2.19: LS 38A). Two older contemporaries, both Romans writing in Greek, fill in other corners of the map. From Epictetus's own teacher, G. **Musonius** Rufus (c. 30–100 CE), we have 20 samples of so-called *Lectures* (compiled by a student and preserved in Stobaeus: see §6), mainly on questions of
p. 63 domestic ethics, ↳ some advocating philosophy for women (Lutz 1947; Inwood 2017). From L. Annaeus **Cornutus** (c. 15–'80s? CE), tutor to Seneca's nephew Lucan, comes a valuable example of Stoic allegorizing in the *Survey of Greek Theological Traditions* (Boys-Stones 2018). Like Seneca before them, both are steeped in early Stoicism but wear a darker veil of reception that makes it hard to determine what they owe to Hellenistic antecedents. The same applies to the emperor **Marcus Aurelius** (121–180 CE, reign from 160) a century later in his deeply Stoic notes "To Himself"—the transmitted title for the famous work known as his *Meditations* (Rutherford 1989; Brunt 1974); likewise for the Stoic course on astronomy in *Heavens* by the otherwise unknown **Cleomedes** (later second century CE?), who avowedly follows Posidonius (Bowen and Todd 2004).[36]

Two works recovered on Egyptian papyri, both of uncertain date but most likely early in the second century, fill in other gaps. Remains of a treatise on the *Elements of Ethics* by a Stoic **Hierocles** (fl. 130?) include extended treatment of his school's distinctive theories of "affiliation" (*oikeiôsis*), which dovetails neatly with extracts from the same author's work *On Duties*, recorded by Stobaeus again (Bastianini and Long 1992; Ramelli 2009). Scraps of a commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus* (covering *Tht*. 142–53) by an "**Anonymous**" Platonist (c. 100?) supplement our record for arguments in epistemology (Bastianini and Sedley 1995).

Two other bodies of material illustrate ancient forms of "doxography" and contrasting ways of organizing summary accounts of philosophical "doctrines" (*doxai*). One form, and the one that inspired the neologism "doxography," adopts a strictly topical approach, presenting rival positions on the same issues in ways that highlight disagreement among those considered. The other form, sometimes labeled haeresiography, presents the views of selected "stances" (*haireseis*) separately, foregrounding coherence by articulating conceptual connections within each tradition's theories.[37] Our examples of each form also pose intricate problems of attribution because they survive only as excerpted in several later sources (see §6). In one case, associated with the name(s) **Arius Didymus**, we have three sets of reports:

1. Capsule summaries of particular points in Stoic and Aristotelian physics, including two excerpts from an "*Epitomê* [or *Digest*] of Arius Didymus" (Eusebius, *PE* 15.15–20);[38]

2. Two separate excerpts on epistemology from a work *On Stances* or *On Tenets* by "Didymus" (*PE* 11.23; Stobaeus, *Anth*. 2.1.17);

3. Three unattributed summaries transcribed in a single series, commonly labeled Doxographies A, B, and C, comprising: A) an analytical "introduction to ethics," B) a methodical survey of Stoic ethics, and C) a similar survey of Peripatetic ethics (*Anth*. 2.7).

An excerpt from Doxography C attributed to "Didymus" (*Anth*. 4.39.28) supports connecting it with Set 2; and the systematic treatment of Stoic and Aristotelian views favors connecting those with Set 1 and Doxography B.[39] All the connections are controversial, however, links to Doxography A tenuous, and the identity of the
p. 64 author, or authors, an ↳ open question; a Stoic from Alexandria named Arius (fl. 30 BCE) admired by Augustus is a plausible candidate, but largely by default, for want of alternatives. Whoever its author/s was/were, the reports on Stoic doctrine rank among our most informative and incisive, even detailing alternative formulations of doctrine by successive Stoics (Algra 2018).

The other case goes by the name of **Aëtius**, a figure shadowy in the extreme, cited as the author of a lost synopsis of "Physical Doctrines of the Philosophers"—*Placita* ("tenets") for short—which has been meticulously reconstructed from material preserved in later sources again, mainly an abridged *Digest* (*Epitomê* again) wrongly preserved among Plutarch's writings (hence commonly cited as "pseudo-Plutarch"), supplemented by parallel material in Stobaeus and others.[40] The date of the original work is obscure but probably first century CE. Even the incomplete digest we now have organizes hundreds of entries in a five-book sequence of 130 topical headings or chapters: starting with principles, then descending from cosmology to meteorology and geophysics, then human psychology and physiology. In the abbreviated and condensed form that has reached us, the presentation is essentially tabular, listing opposing positions on each topic with their proponents, typically arranged on the basis of conceptual distinctions that often reflect Hellenistic debates and repay attention in their own right. Its telegraphic style notwithstanding, the digest preserves much valuable information for our period.

5. Magisterial Summations

Widespread stability and general prosperity across the Roman empire in the later second century CE promoted a general consolidation of learning along with cultural nostalgia for the Greek heritage and its enduring classics, which in philosophy still encompassed the Hellenistic schools. Four major sources emerge, probably all from Asia Minor, and all writing in Greek: the doctor Galen of Pergamum and the Aristotelian Alexander of Aphrodisias, each the leading authority in his field, and two others we know only by their writings, the philosophical biographer Diogenes Laertius, and a Pyrrhonian physician named Sextus Empiricus.

Our single most informative source, unequaled in range and detail, is **Diogenes Laertius** (fl. 200?), from Laertes in southern Asia Minor. His *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* presents a panoramic history of Greek philosophy from its Presocratic origins to the acme of the Hellenistic schools, articulated as a genealogical tree of concise "Lives" that trace the ramifying influence of the lives and teachings of scores of philosophers through the generational "successions" of their students and followers (White 2021). Each of the Hellenistic schools receives extended treatment, covering leading figures of the founding generations. Book 7 on the Stoics and Book 10 on Epicurus stand out as both longest and richest in documentation, with comprehensive Stoic
 doxography and bibliographies, and four complete works of Epicurus ↳ transcribed (cf. §1). Other books discuss Academics and Pyrrhonism, alongside seminal influences, including Cynics, Cyrenaics, Megarics, and Peripatetics. The entire work is peppered with citations, especially of individual Stoics in Book 7, but also of intervening authorities whose work is in turn lost. Although we can rarely be sure that Diogenes consulted those firsthand, he is uniquely informative about ancillary traditions of philosophical biography, historiography, and doxography, much of it Hellenistic and attested nowhere else.[41] Examples relevant here include Timon's *Lampoons* (cf. §1), Diocles on Stoic logic (LS 39A), biographies by Antigonus of Carystus, and the *Register* of Philodemus (Fleischer 2019). In addition to its abundant biographical detail, much of it unparalleled, the *Lives* is our main bibliographical source, mainly in the lists of writings Diogenes supplies wherever available (cf. §1), but also for his detailed citations, which even address cases of disputed authenticity (cf. LS 67B).

Sextus Empiricus (fl. 200?) is another source who appears only in Diogenes Laertius, where he stands at the end of a line of Pyrrhonist skeptics (*Lives* 9.116) as a virtual contemporary of Diogenes. Even his name is suitably enigmatic: the first distinctly Roman, the other a label for adherents of the Empiricist school of medicine that shared the Pyrrhonist aversion to explanation.[42] Three works by Sextus are at once our main source for this post-Hellenistic form of skepticism, presented by a cogent exponent, and also, thanks to his systematic canvassing of the views he counters, a rich source for ideas and arguments from Hellenistic and earlier periods. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, true to its title, introduces the stance's distinctive method of oppositional argument in *PH* 1, then applies it serially to key topics in logic, physics, and ethics in *PH* 2–3 (Annas and Barnes 1994). *Against the Disciplines* confronts classical learning more broadly with separate critiques of grammar, rhetoric, and four branches of mathematics in six books (*M* 1–6 for *Adversus Mathematicos*, literally *Against the Learned*: Bett 2018). The richest source for Hellenistic philosophy is a third work, or more precisely, its surviving latter half, which poses more expansive Pyrrhonist critiques of logic, physics, and ethics in five books corresponding to *PH* 2–3. Originally part of a *magnum opus* entitled *Skeptical Studies* (cf. DL 9.116), which has lost its opening analog to *PH* 1, the surviving five books were formerly viewed as continuing *Against the Disciplines* and accordingly numbered *M* 7–11. Scholars today, however, favor separate titles for its three parts: *Against the Logicians*, *Against the Physicists*, and *Against the Ethicists* for *M* 7–8, *M* 9–10, and *M* 11, respectively (Bett 2005, 2012, 1997). Doggedly partisan as Sextus is, even tendentious at times, he is our sole source for material all over the map, and especially informative on Stoic logic. He also tends to identify his "dogmatic" adversaries, at least by stance if not always by name—for example, helpfully differentiating several Academics. And operating in a largely conservative tradition, he recounts Hellenistic arguments relatively free of interference from later developments.

Galen (129–c. 215), the preeminent medical authority of antiquity, differs radically from his fellow physician in fame, fortune, and philosophical outlook. Following his own precept that "the best doctor is also a philosopher" (as he argues in a pamphlet so titled), he shot to the pinnacle of his profession as imperial physician serving
p. 66 Marcus ↳ Aurelius. Voluminous writer that he was, his surviving works far surpass every other author's, numbering over 100 works, many in multiple "books"; even after extensive losses, his corpus today is easily the largest we have (roughly an eighth of everything in Greek up to his time).[43] Cultural vicissitudes have favored the medical writings, especially those handier for practicing physicians. The corpus nonetheless includes many works that dwell on philosophical issues, often with extensive reference to Hellenistic ideas and arguments. Galen's personal tally in *On My Own Books*, written after a raging fire in Rome destroyed his library in 192 CE, testifies to current trends and to his own wide knowledge, citing lost studies he produced on Chrysippus, Epicurus, and Clitomachus as well as his favored Plato and Aristotle.[44] Overall, Galen's own professional concerns shape what he reports: questions of methodology and physiology predominate, but epistemology and causation also loom large.[45] An instructive case is the treatise *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* in nine books, which builds a critique of Stoic psychology around extensive excerpts from Chrysippus and Posidonius; its extensive documentation offers cautionary lessons in polemical reporting along with tantalizing samples of those lost targets of Galen's criticism (Tieleman 1996, 2003).

Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. 200), whose appointment to an imperial chair of Aristotelian philosophy indicates his contemporary prominence, produced a magisterial body of work explicating Aristotle's texts and defending Aristotelian positions in a way that shaped discussion for centuries to come. Surviving writings include complete commentaries on *Prior Analytics* 1, *Topics*, *Meteorology*, *On Sense Perception*, and *Metaphysics* 1–5 (the remainder lost); portions of others covering the rest of Aristotle's logic and physics also survive, some in Arabic translation, and in often extensive quotations in later commentaries, which often cite Alexander simply as "the Exegete." Most valuable for Hellenistic thought, especially for critical discussion of Stoic theories, are separate studies *On Fate* (Sharples 1983), *On Mixture* (Todd 1976), a so-called *Supplement to On Soul* (infelicitously dubbed *Mantissa* or "filler": Sharples 2004), and a series of *Ethical Problems* (Sharples 1990) among scores of miscellaneous "problems and solutions" in physics and ethics collectively known as *Questions*.

The same era saw some philosophically trained converts to Christianity deploy their learning to champion their new religion. Most notable among these first "Church Fathers" is **Clement of Alexandria** (c. 150–c. 215 CE), whose zeal to establish the superiority of his new faith over Greek philosophy drives his *Patchwork* (*Strômata*) in seven books (Osborne 2010). The work is packed with excerpts and summaries from earlier philosophy, often cited in ostensibly neutral testimony to convict his opponents by their own words. Valuable especially for Stoicism, it also supplies our single most comprehensive doxography of the ethical *telos* or human good (cf. LS 63J). Other significant sources among the Fathers include **Origen** (c. 185–250s CE), whose blow by blow *Reply to Celsus* (Platonist author of a lost attack on the Church) addresses Stoicism repeatedly; and **Tertullian** (c. 160–c. 240 CE), a zealous convert from Roman Carthage who martials Stoic theories to attack Platonism in a Latin treatise *On the Soul*.

6. Aftermath

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The third century CE saw the demise of Hellenistic philosophy as a set of living traditions with active proponents. Writings of the original Stoics, Epicureans, and Academics thereafter steadily disappeared, as philosophical teaching focused increasingly on Platonic and Aristotelian texts and faced a rising tide of Christian apologetics. Once the imperial court adopted the new religion in the fourth century under the emperors Constantine (306–337) and Theodosius (379–395), Hellenistic thinkers were well on their way to joining their Presocratic predecessors as objects of largely theoretical or historical interest. Later sources accordingly engage with Hellenistic ideas from increasingly scholastic perspectives, not as serious rivals or contenders for allegiance.

Among Platonists, the great **Plotinus** (205–270) still takes Stoic positions seriously in his *Enneads*, as the posthumous collection of his writings in six "sets of nine" is called. Topics he addresses at length include Stoic theories of "blending throughout" in *Ennead* 2.7 (37), fate in 3.1 (3), a material soul in 4.7 (2), and categories of being in 6.1 (42).[46] Acutely probing and sympathetic in their critiques, his discussions are also highly allusive and schematic, which naturally complicates tracing *his* sources.[47] Not once are any Stoics named, even as a group, and Epicurus only once. His student, and compiler of the *Enneads*, **Porphyry** of Tyre (234–c. 305) supplies useful material too, notably our sole substantial report for Epicurus's successor Hermarchus in a treatise against animal sacrifice (*On Abstinence*: LS 22M–N; Clark 2000). Later Platonists carried the scholastic approach further, conducting their teaching mainly through close study of canonical texts, recorded in the form of exegetical commentaries.[48] The curriculum culminated with Plato's dialogues after working through the treatises of Aristotle, where points in Stoic logic and physics frequently arise. One of the last and most voluminous commentators, **Simplicius** (480s–c. 560), whose treatments of Aristotle's *Categories* and *Physics* are important sources in those areas, deploys the same methods to refashion Arrian's *Handbook of Epictetus* (50 extracts from the *Discourses*; cf. §4) into a training manual for budding Platonists (Brennan and Brittain 2002), one of many paths through which Stoicism had continued to shape later philosophy.

Patristic writers also continue to engage with Hellenistic material in later centuries, though less and less. Here our most important source is **Eusebius** (c. 260–339), bishop of Caesarea, whose *Preparation for the Gospel* (*PE* for *Praeparatio Evangelica*) in 15 books is packed with extracts from philosophical works in the library Origen established there. Besides key material from "Arius Didymus" (cf. §4 above) and dollops of Porphyry, Eusebius preserves valuable excerpts from the Aristotelian Aristocles (fl. 10 BCE?) on epistemology, including a précis of Timon's Pyrrhonism (LS 1F); a critique of Stoic views on fate from the Epicurean Diogenianus (c. 100 CE?); and
p. 68 polemics against Academic ↳ skeptics from the second-century Platonist Numenius (cf. LS 68F–G). On the Latin side, three contributors stand out. A commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* (covering 31–53) by **Calcidius** (fourth century, and more likely pagan) confronts Stoic physics repeatedly (Reydams-Schils 2020). Both Stoicism and Epicurus are frequent targets for the apologist L. Caelius Firmianus **Lactantius** (c. 240–c. 320) in his *Divine Institutes*, which incidentally paraphrases lost portions of Cicero's *On the Republic*, including its account of some famous lectures by the Academic Carneades in Rome, first arguing for justice, then against it (cf. LS 68M). A century later appears the prodigious **Augustine** (354–430), who turned to philosophy after reading Cicero. Accordingly, he adds to our record mainly in epistemology, and most notably in an early dialogue *Against the Academics* countering Cicero's arguments for skepticism (Fuhrer 1997). Hellenistic influence is evident throughout his enormous corpus, but mainly digested from Cicero, and thoroughly incorporated or transmuted into his own thinking, hence more instructive for reception than recovery of any Hellenistic originals.

Other late sources are few and highly derivative, but happily they include one of the richest of all: a massive *Anthology* of excerpts compiled by John **Stobaeus** (fl. 420), from Stobi in Roman Macedonia, ostensibly for the edification of his son. Filling four huge books (the first two severely abridged in transmission), it transcribes thousands of "selections" ranging from single lines to dozens of pages, drawn from hundreds of philosophers, poets, and others, systematically organized in over 200 topical chapters, every item originally labeled with a lemma naming the author (or authority for maxims and oral remarks) and often a title.[49] A preamble, preserved only in a later summary by Photius, even included a table of contents to facilitate consultation. As fate has it, the *Anthology* is our sole source for important earlier sources already noted, including Cleanthes's "Hymn to Zeus" (cf. §1), most of Arius Didymus, and much of Aëtius and Hierocles (cf. §4), but significantly, not for any actual Hellenistic treatises, which were evidently no longer available to our anthologist.

Bringing our survey to a fitting end is **Photius** (c. 810–c. 893), patriarch of Constantinople and leading scholar of his era, who composed an "inventory" of his scholarly reading in another voluminous work, aptly known as his *Library*. The roughly 400 works he summarizes there in 280 "codices" or chapters cover mainly theology and history, but also a key document in the Pyrrhonist revival inaugurated by Aenesidemus (Cod. 212, cf. LS 71C; see Sedley, this volume and Wynne, this volume), as well as the contents of Stobaeus noted above (Cod. 167) and writings by several others we have met along our way: Philo, Plutarch, Clement, Diogenes Laertius, Galen, Eusebius, and Origen. Working at the center of Byzantine learning amid an early renaissance of classical studies, Photius provides an instructive index of where Hellenistic philosophy then stood: accessible only indirectly and largely ignored. If any writings of Epicurus or Hellenistic Stoics did still survive, they left little trace. That is roughly where we find ourselves today, a thousand years later—except that our access to the period has been significantly improved via texts recovered from papyri and other sources unknown to Photius.

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7. Modern Sourcebooks

Stobaeus and Photius (§6), in their compiling practices, presage modern efforts to assemble synoptic records of lost work by collecting excerpts from surviving sources, sometimes characterizing passages quoted verbatim or attributed to titles as "fragments" in contrast to "testimony" in reports that only summarize or paraphrase. The trailblazing collection of *Epicurea* in Usener (1887), for example, organizes its evidence for Epicurus in four sections: the three letters and *Key Doctrines* in DL 10; passages that cite lost works; "fragments of unknown works and testimony for doctrines"; and the philosopher's *Life* in DL 10.[50] For Stoicism, by contrast, von Arnim's *SVF* (1903-5) organizes material topically under individual Stoics; classes of testimony are differentiated by typography, and individual appendixes list the titles cited.[51] An arrangement that highlights reception over content is sometimes adopted for individual figures, as in a recent collection on Arcesilaus by Vezzoli (2016), which follows the chronological order of the sources and supplies notes on context. Excerpting practices also vary. Long and Sedley in LS (1987) adopt a topical presentation that favors short excerpts, for example, while Inwood and Gerson (1997) foreground major sources in continuous excerpts—not unlike the contrasting approaches to doxography in Aëtius and Arius Didymus, respectively (cf. §4). Collecting related evidence in sourcebooks like these has obvious benefits in promoting synoptic vision and highlighting connections between material from disparate sources. It also has its risks, most notably eliding contextual factors of audience, format, and especially authorial background and agenda, factors which affect how our sources handle their material and can also indicate the access they had to any "original" Hellenistic material in the first place.

Approaching Hellenistic philosophy through a sourcebook is like visiting a museum of antiquities. The items on display have been methodically organized to exhibit an instructive range of the available holdings, highlighting examples and features deemed especially appealing or significant, responsive to prevailing interests but based on broad knowledge of the field and its traditions. The objects selected will typically vary widely in date and place of origin, as in form, material, and function, and many will be incomplete or fragmentary. Some might be captivating, others more informative, some simply ignored. Yet all have stories to tell, stories which are told—so far as hitherto reconstructed—in the vast body of ongoing scholarship on which the display ultimately depends. An effective sourcebook rests on similar command of the stories behind its highly selective presentation. Just as an exhibit reflects the curator's comprehensive knowledge of other collections, sites of origin and recovery, and histories of production and transmission, so a sourcebook presents only the proverbial tip of a comparable iceberg. Critical study requires going deeper, looking below the surface, examining the sources directly to analyze and assess the evidence in its wider contexts, literary and rhetorical, cultural and historical, and, above all, logical and philosophical. The Symposium Hellenisticum, which has been
p. 70 a leader in reinvigorating the study of Hellenistic philosophy since the 1970s, ↳ has recently done the same, devoting some of its triennial sessions to analyzing single works by major sources: Cicero's *Academics* (Inwood and Mansfeld 1997) and *On Ends* (Annas and Betegh 2016), and Sextus's *Against the Physicists* (Algra and Ierodiakonou 2015). Direct study of the sources is and always will be integral both to the recovery of Hellenistic ideas and arguments, and to their philosophical analysis.

The inventory of sources continues to grow as well with the advent of new material from several directions. Ancient papyri have added dramatically to our record (cf. §1), and further additions are certain, very likely including original Hellenistic texts. Countless papyri from Herculaneum remain unedited, hundreds of fragile rolls awaiting technological advances either for safe unraveling or for decipherment by other means. As it is, new insights into how previous editions confused the sequence of passages, and improved techniques for reading the carbonized texts are yielding much more accurate editions, and more are imminent, progressing, or planned.[52] New finds continue to appear from other quarters too, and not only in papyri.[53] Translations of later sources into neighboring languages have also enlarged the record, especially Arabic versions of Galen and Alexander, and Armenian versions of Philo.[54] If prospects for comparable new finds on those fronts are becoming less likely, surprising discoveries occasionally turn up even in neglected Greek and Latin manuscripts, as in the recent recovery of Galen's long-lost essay *On Avoiding Distress* (Nutton 2017), or the portion of a commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, probably by Porphyry, hidden under monastic prayers in a recycled manuscript now called the Archimedes Palimpsest (Chiaradonna et al. 2013). Texts long available also continue to supply new evidence from neglected corners; a Byzantine rhetorical handbook (c. 1000), for example, has revealed unsuspected dialectical maneuvers of Epicurus (Sedley 2019). Continually revisiting the sources, both old and new, original and later, is thus vital not only to the field's ongoing renewal but also to extending its reach by expanding its resources.

Further Reading

Discussions of the sources for Hellenistic philosophy tend to be piecemeal, focused on particular authors or texts, philosophers or topics. Helpful overviews that address aspects not pursued here are Mansfeld 1999, highlighting ancient forms of philosophical historiography, and Sharples 2006, illustrating some common problems. Kidd 1997 raises important issues in asking what a fragment is. Mansfeld 1994 examines the forms of philosophical pedagogy that lie behind much of what our sources report. For case studies, two models among the many that could be named are Erler 2020 on Plutarch's treatment of Epicureanism and Bobzien 1998 on Stoic determinism.

Standard sourcebooks are noted in §7. Collections of evidence for individual philosophers are listed together with editions of major sources in Algra et al. 1999: 805–19. For philosophers and sources alike, Goulet 1989–2018 provides brief biographies with thorough analytical bibliography. Gerson 2010 provides synoptic treatment of many of the later sources discussed here alongside other Platonists and Christian Fathers. Translations and scholarship cited in this chapter provide pointers to additional work in related areas.

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Notes

1. Sedley 2003.

2. Complete works by major philosophers from antiquity are exceptional, though later thinkers naturally fare better; we have a complete corpus only for Plato and Plotinus; cf. Goulet 2007.

3. The process is often likened to piecing together a jigsaw puzzle, though one that has countless pieces missing and no guiding image or determinate boundaries. The complexity of the evidence and of its study alike might be more aptly likened to curating classical artifacts, where Roman "copies" predominate in sculpture; for example, see §7.

4. Goulet 2007.

5. Figures are based on lists in DL supplemented by citations collected in *DPhA* for the Stoics in *SVF* and comparable philosophers in other traditions; entries not based primarily on DL are italicized. Titles having no specified number of books are counted as single books, or as two if indefinitely many; both factors presumably aggravate undercounting.

6. The curious figure of 705 matches a bequest of "circa 700 books of Chrysippus" by the Roman poet Persius (Seneca's nephew) to the Stoic Cornutus (Suetonius, *Life of Persius*; cf. §4). Barnes 1996 is an instructive study of the list in DL.

7. Long 1978, Bett 2000.

8. Goulet 2018.

9. The *Phaenomena* by Aratus (c. 315–240s), an immensely influential 1154-verse poem charting the stars and their movements which distinctly signals Stoic influence in its prologue, should be noted too, minimally as a token of Stoicism's wider impact; Volk 2010.

10. For Philodemus, Blank 2019; for his writings, Essler 2019; for the library Sider 2009, Henry 2013. A handy inventory of accessible texts is maintained by the *Thesaurus Herculanensium Voluminum*; for its digital corpus, see http://epikur-wuerzburg.de/aktivitaeten/editio/thv. The journal *Cronache Ercolanesi* (*CErc*) is devoted to work concerning the site and principally its papyri.

11. Sedley 1998: 94–133.

12. Text of the Academic section in Fleischer 2023 with commentary, English translation in Kalligas et al. 2020; text of the Stoic section in Dorandi 1994; Dorandi 1999 for chronology.

13. Haake 2007.

14. Notably the Stoics Zeno, Chrysippus, Posidonius, the Academic Carneades, and Epicurus and two associates; Richter 1984 for images and testimony, Zanker 1995 for discussion, a full list in Goulet 2018.

15. Erler 2009 illustrates alternative reconstructions. Roughly 6,000 words survive from a projected original of about 25,000 words; text in Smith 1993, updated by Hammerstaedt and Smith 2014; cf. Hammerstaedt et al. 2017. The site remains largely unexcavated, and more of the inscription is likely to be found.

16. Cf. Clay 2009: 18–22. Wills for Hellenistic Peripatetics recorded in DL are similarly informative (5.51–7, 5.61–4, 5.69–74); one for Arcesilaus conversely laconic (4.44).

17. Questions about what earlier sources an existing source relied on once dominated the field under the banner of *Quellenforschung*; Barnes 1986 offers a case study of Nietzsche's efforts.

18. Frede 1999.

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19. In our latest reference to texts of Hellenistic philosophy, the Aristotelian Themistius (*Oration* 4 60a–c) worries in 357 CE that Stoicism's canonical writings will vanish unless recopied.

20. The commentator Simplicius (§6), writing after Justinian closed the Platonist schools, similarly eclipses most of his predecessors.

21. Sources are listed in descending order of frequency, from DL to Philo. A census of citations in Algra et al. 1999 yields very similar results.

22. Mansfeld 2020.

23. Gigante 1986, White 2020.

24. White 2010.

25. For the Stoic Epictetus, whose teachings a student recorded, see §4, with some other more or less professional Stoic writings by Cleomedes, Cornutus, Hierocles, and Musonius.

26. Boys-Stones 2018, Engberg-Pedersen 2017.

27. The record, though scanty, shows they had predecessors and contemporaries in Latin (Rawson 1985: 282–97); Lucretius and Cicero stand out less as trailblazers than for raising the standard and increasing the impact of philosophical writing in their native language.

28. Farrell 2007.

29. Sedley 1998, esp. 62–93 on "Lucretius the fundamentalist"; cf. Warren 2007, Bakker 2016.

30. Thanks primarily to a huge corpus of letters to and from friends, family, and associates; Rawson 1983 for intellectual biography.

31. Schofield 2017; and Dyck 2004, Annas 2013 on the *Laws*.

32. Schofield 2008.

33. Varro, an admirer of Antiochus (on whom, see Sedley, this volume), was himself a prolific writer and another source for Stoic and related views on ethics, religion, and language; Blank 2012.

34. Griffin 1992.

35. Scaltsas and Mason 2007.

36. An earlier and more important source for Posidonius (130s–c. 50 BCE) is **Strabo** (64 BCE–'20s CE), whose colossal *Geography* is heavily indebted to the Stoic's pioneering work on geophysics and ethnography.

37. Mansfeld 2020.

38. Runia 1996 provides a handy list of 72 fragments.

39. Mansfeld and Runia 1997: 238–65, Hatzimichali 2017.

40. For sources and authorship, see Mansfeld and Runia 1997, building on the pioneering work of Diels 1879; cf. Gourinat 2011, 2018. Mansfeld and Runia 2023 provide a newly reconstructed text with translation, based on Mansfeld and Runia 2020; for Hellenistic material, Long 2018, Runia 2018.

41. Mejer 1978, Goulet 1997.

42. Allen 2010.

43. The most comprehensive edition by Kuhn (1819–33) fills over 20,000 pages in 22 fat volumes but lacks many works recovered later; for orientation, see Hankinson 2008 with helpful lists of titles and editions.

44. Flemming 2008.

45. Tieleman 2009.

46. Regarding the citation format: *Ennead* 6.1 (42), for example, is the first study in the sixth "set of nine" (*ennead*), and a late work, 42nd in the chronological list supplied in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*.

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47. Graeser 1972.

48. Hoffmann 2006.

49. Searby 2011. The distinct titles *Selections* (*Eclogae*) for Books 1–2 (covering physics and ethics) and *Anthology* (*Florilegium*) for Books 3–4 (virtues and duties) are a modern convention reflecting transmission of the text, the first half of which survives only in severely abridged form.

50. Important especially for papyri is Arrighetti 1973; cf. note 10.

51. For the typography and von Arnim's idiosyncratic assessment of sources, see *SVF* Preface to vol. 1. Major supplements for logic in Hülser 1987–9, Panaetius in Alesse 1997, Posidonius in Edelstein and Kidd 1988–99.

52. Janko 2016.

53. For Herculaneum papyri, cf. note 10. Papyri of other philosophical authors and texts are collected in the *Corpus dei Papiri Filosofici Greci e Latini* or *CPF* (1989–); cf. http://www.papirifilosofici.it/cpf.html.

54. The Syriac and Arabic traditions encountered Hellenistic philosophy only indirectly, through later scientific writings, Platonist philosophy, and Aristotelian commentary; see Gutas 1994, Strohmaier 1998, D'Ancona 2005.

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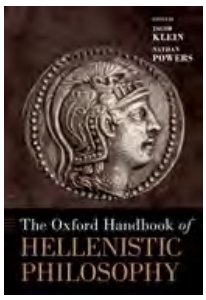
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PART II

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CHAPTER

3 The Principles of Epicurean Atomism

Keimpe Algra

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Abstract

This chapter investigates the physical and metaphysical principles of Epicurean atomism, beginning (§1) with an examination of the way in which these principles were rooted within a historical tradition of discussion which included Eleatic philosophy, Democritus, Aristotle, and Diodorus Cronus. After examining some metaphysical principles that crucially determine the outlines of Epicurean physics (§2), the chapter turns to a discussion of the only two per se existents recognized by Epicurus: bodies and space. Several possible reconstructions of Epicurus's main argument for the existence of atomic bodies are reviewed (§3), as are various interpretations of the Epicurean conceptions of space and void and their relation to one another (§4). The remaining sections cover atomic motion (§5), minimal parts versus infinite divisibility (§6), and the Epicurean understanding of permanent and temporary properties and of time (§7).

Keywords: Epicurus, atomism, atomic bodies, space, void, atomic motion, infinite divisibility, minimal parts, time

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1. The Philosophical Pedigree

There can be no doubt that the Epicurean version of atomism owes much to its fifth century BCE counterpart as developed by Democritus (who himself appears to have further worked out the theory of Leucippus). Epicurus studied under Nausiphanes of Teos, a pupil of Democritus, and in his younger years professed himself to be a "Democritean" for quite some time (Plutarch *Adv. Col*. 1108e). Nevertheless, as the rest of this chapter will illustrate, he developed marked positions of his own on a number of points. Later sources even allege that his attitude toward Democritus became hypercritical and condescending, which they interpreted as the ungrateful behavior of a man who had otherwise had no qualms about plundering Democritus's work.[1] However, such claims stem from a polemical tradition, probably largely going back to a scandalizing treatise written by the renegade Epicurean Timocrates.[2] Epicurus's general attitude can be safely inferred from a papyrus fragment from the twenty-fifth book of his *On Nature* (LS 20C), which speaks of the early atomists as "men greatly excelling not only their predecessors but also, many times over, their successors." Their texts apparently offered a prototype, unavailable anywhere else, of what Epicurus wanted to offer himself: a form of unflinching materialism and a worldview entirely devoid of quasi-religious external moving causes like Anaxagoras's Mind or Empedocles's Love and Strife.

Democritus's system was not just another cosmological theory next to others, but a conscious attempt to answer, or at least dodge, important elements of what has been called the "Eleatic challenge." Parmenides and his followers (Melissus, Zeno) had argued that our daily experience of the world, with its plurality and change, should not be trusted, and that being (*to on*), when approached exclusively through reason, turned out to be necessarily one, indivisible, unchangeable, and not somewhere or in a place. The early atomists accepted some
p. 82 elements of this view, but rejected others, in order to ↳ be able to adopt a more positive view of change. Thus, they agreed that real being should be indivisible and unchangeable, but instead of denying plurality they posited an infinity of such "beings" (*onta* or *ousiai*), also called "atoms" (*atomos*, meaning "uncut" or "uncuttable"). The temporary aggregates of these atoms in their view constitute the phenomenal world (i.e., the world of physical objects as they appear to us), and these aggregates can be formed, and again dissolved, because the atoms move through the void (*kenon*), also called "not-being" (*mê on*) or "nothing" (*mêden*), though not in the Parmenidean sense of absolute not-being, but as being a negation of the nature of the atoms (i.e., "full"). They defended this theory of indivisible elements with a combination of physical and conceptual arguments, the latter drawn at least in part from the Eleatic tradition.[3]

Epicurus's language does not show the kind of direct traces of the encounter with Eleatic thought that we find in the case of Democritus: he does not call his atoms "beings" (*onta*) nor his void "not-being" (*mê on*) or "nothing" (*mêden*). However, we do find other traces of Eleatic thinking that may have reached him via Democritus, in particular in what we might call the metaphysical principles of his atomism, such as the oft-repeated argument that nothing can come from nothing or not-being (cf. Parmenides DK29 B8, esp. lines 7–9), and the argument against infinite divisibility of magnitudes (going back to some of the paradoxes of Zeno).

Puzzles and paradoxes concerning finite or infinite divisibility remained on the philosophical agenda also after the Eleatics and Democritus. Aristotle had ample opportunity to discuss the notion of indivisibles in his account of motion and the continuum in *Physics* 6. Two points he makes there appear to have strongly influenced subsequent discussions of atomism.[4] The first is that it is unclear how indivisible magnitudes—Aristotle himself is primarily thinking of points, but he makes clear the argument can be generalized over other types of indivisibles (231a29)—could be arranged to make up a whole line or a whole body. They can neither be continuous (*suneches*) nor contiguous (*haptomenon*) since both options involve the notion of *limits* (these being "one" in the case of continuity and "together" in the case of contiguity) and indivisibles have no limits (231a26–9); nor can they even be "next in succession" (*ephexês*), for that would involve that there is nothing of a similar kind in between them, but between two indivisible points there is always a line—i.e., a set of further points (231b7–10).

A second influential claim made by Aristotle in *Physics* 6 is that magnitude, motion, and time are connected subjects: they are either all made up of indivisibles—i.e., atomic units—or none of them is, so that they are all continuous (231b19–21). If they are all considered as atomic, he objects, indivisible magnitudes cannot be taken to move—in the sense of gradually traversing a trajectory—on their own. For such an individual motion would be reduced to a staccato transfer from one indivisible place AB in one time atom to the next indivisible place BC in the next, thus in fact amounting to a series of rests, situations in which, absurdly, the body can only be said to *have moved* (*kekineisthai*, 241a1) without having ever been in a process of moving (one is reminded of Zeno's paradox of the arrow: a body is moving neither in the place in which it is, nor in a place in which it is not, DK29 A27).

p. 83 Epicurus's theory of minimal parts within the atom and of the way they are arranged in succession (on which see §6) has usually been interpreted as, among other things, an attempt to answer Aristotle's first point.[5] We do not need to assume that in doing so it specifically reacted to the text of Aristotle's *Physics*. The argument may have reached Epicurus in a variety of ways. The contemporary Peripatos was a popular hotspot, with Theophrastus attracting large numbers of students. And in general, quasi-Eleatic contemporary puzzles of the type we are dealing with appear to have circulated in various guises; thus, they were discussed in the Academy under Xenocrates, by the author of the pseudo-Aristotelian tract *On Indivisible Lines* and, later on, by Diodorus Cronus.[6]

Diodorus Cronus, who belonged to the so-called dialectical school and appears to have had a considerable influence on philosophical life in Athens around 300 BCE, apparently took up Aristotle's second point.[7] As part of his attempt to show that motion "does not exist," he positively endorsed what for Aristotle had been only an absurd conclusion: an indivisible cannot be moving, in the sense of being engaged in the process of moving from one indivisible place to another, in any indivisible time; rather it can only be said to *have moved* at the next indivisible time.[8] There are no clear direct traces of Diodorus's influence in this respect in Epicurus's extant writings. The theory of minima as we find it in the *Letter to Herodotus* only concerns minima within the atom (not minima in time, motion, or space). However, this letter probably predates Epicurus's founding of the Garden in Athens, in which case it comes from a period in which Epicurus was possibly not yet acquainted with Diodorus.[9] We do have indirect evidence in some later sources (Sextus Empiricus, Themistius, and Simplicius) that suggests that either Epicurus himself in his later years, or some of his followers, may have come under the spell of Diodorus's conceptual analysis of the (discrete) structure of magnitude, motion and space (see §6).

2. Three Metaphysical Principles

Our most important source on the basics of Epicurean atomism is Epicurus's own *Letter to Herodotus*, preserved in the tenth book of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (10.34–83). This text can in many cases be paralleled or supplemented by passages in Lucretius. The letter is an epitome, most probably summarizing the first 13 books of Epicurus's *On Nature*.[10] It is a difficult text, sometimes condensed almost to the point of unintelligibility, and there are many places where the correct reading of the Greek is uncertain, no doubt because in the course of its transmission scribes had difficulties understanding what they were copying out. Its interpretation, as a result, is often less certain than one might wish, and some of its crucial arguments admit of various reconstructions. Although the text itself appears to be rather carefully structured, the argument is not always linear.[11] As its introduction makes clear, the letter is not a primer, but an epitome for the advanced; the idea is primarily to give a coherent set of principles to be used by the reader as a framework within which
p. 84 further details can be ↳ ordered (a point made both at the beginning and at the end: *Ep. Hdt.* 36 and 83). The exact sequence of topics does not always appear to be of primary concern.

The letter starts with an introduction (35–8) on how it should be used, and on some methodological principles. Among the latter is the important claim that we should use perceptions and feelings as "signs"

(*sêmeiôsometha*) for the things that await confirmation and for the non-evident (*adêlon*). This refers to the epistemological principle that claims about the non-evident—i.e., objects not clearly or not at all accessible to sense perception, such as the atoms—can and should be underpinned by reference to phenomena that *can* be clearly perceived. This underpinning can take the form of "contestation" (of alternative views) or non-contestation (of Epicurus's own view, usually through drawing analogies with the world of experience).[12] In the rest of the letter, Epicurus clearly practices what he preaches. The text may be an epitome, but it is not a mere doxography of Epicurean tenets: it abounds with arguments justifying these tenets, and we frequently find explicit references to the procedure of non-contestation. The same goes for Lucretius's poem, which goes back, directly or indirectly, to the same source: Epicurus's *On Nature*.[13]

Before embarking on his exposition of atoms and their motion, Epicurus starts out by formulating three quite general—we might say, metaphysical—principles. They are often referred to as his three "principles of conservation." The first two of them are complementary: that nothing comes from not-being, and that nothing perishes into not-being. These are broadly shared views among Greek philosophers, and arguments for them go back to the Eleatics, in particular to Parmenides's argument that being cannot come to be from not-being, or perish into not-being, because we cannot consistently use the notion of not-being (DK29 B8, esp. lines 7–9). Epicurus, however, does not base his claims directly on this kind of conceptual analysis, but rather (in conformity with the rules of his epistemology) underpins them by a reference to experience. As for the first principle, he shows that the opposite thesis, viz. that things can come from nothing, is counter-witnessed (contested) by experience: "in that case everything would come into being from everything" (*Ep. Hdt.* 38). That is, in that case we would not see the regularities we do in fact see, with things always coming from a well-defined pre-existing matter—plants from seed etc.—but we would be constantly surprised by all kinds of spontaneous generation. Epicurus thus excludes generation without an appropriate material cause. The evidence of Lucretius shows that what I call here "appropriate" includes two conditions. First, the matter must be appropriate to the thing that is coming to be (things come to be from "fixed seeds"; 1.169; LS 4B). Second, it must persist in the change. Thus, Lucretius (1.665–89) indicates that Heraclitus's conception of fire turning itself into other elements (and not persisting as fire in these new guises) involves the annihilation of fire which, in turn, means that it involves a form of generation from not-being or nothing. The second principle—that nothing perishes into nothingness—is also supported by contestation from experience of the opposite claim: if things perished into nothingness, rather than into other things, the universe would long since have been annihilated. Note that neither of these first two principles presupposes the details of Epicurean physics, such as its atomism.

p. 85 The third general principle states that the universe (the "totality," *to pan*) has always been and will always be such as it is now. The very short argument which Epicurus then provides (according to some, there are two parallel arguments) is difficult and has been much discussed.[14] I think the most natural way to translate the Greek is as follows:

> For there is nothing for it to change into. For there exists nothing in addition to the totality, which could enter into it and produce the change.
>
> (*Ep. Hdt.* 39; LS 4A)[15]

The argument is then best read, against the background of the previous two principles of conservation, as claiming that the universe does not change, because it cannot change in the way individual substances change —i.e., through the influx of external matter. For there is no such external matter.[16]

The argument might seem to be of a less general nature than the arguments for the first two principles which, as we saw, did not presuppose atomism. After all, the fact that an external cause for change is excluded only guarantees the stability of the universe if we know that its basic ingredients cannot *themselves* change. That they cannot do so is of course what Epicurus himself believes and states elsewhere in the letter, and Lucretius

(1.584–98; LS 8B) takes it to be empirically supported by the observed regularities in nature, but it can hardly be taken as something either evident a priori, or universally believed. It is possible, though, that Epicurus took it as something that followed from his first principle, as Lucretius's critique of Heraclitus, referred to above, might seem to suggest.[17] Anyway, the third principle turns out to be equally basic for Epicurean physics as the first two. All in all, we have now been told not only that the principles of material causation apply, without exception, to all physical processes (first two principles) but also that they will always keep doing so (third principle), for the universe as a whole will not change.

3. Bodies and Atoms

Epicurus's main argument for the existence of atomic bodies comprises two stages: the first one (*Ep. Hdt*. 39) concerns the existence of bodies in general, the second one concerns the existence of *atomic* bodies (*Ep. Hdt.* 40). That bodies in general exist is taken to be evident on the basis of sense perception: macroscopic bodies can be seen and touched. That these perceptible bodies consist of indivisible units, atoms, is argued separately, a little later (the intervening text is about space, on which see §4):

> Further, among bodies, some are compounds, and some are those things from which compounds have been made. And these are atomic (*atoma*) and unchangeable (*ametablêta*) if indeed they are not all going to be destroyed into not-being, but will remain firmly during the dissolution of compounds, being full by nature and ↳ not-being subject to dissolution in any way or fashion. Consequently, the principles of bodies must be atomic natures.
>
> (*Ep. Hdt*. 40–1; LS 8A)[18]

p. 86

The argument is extremely condensed. Most importantly, it does not spell out why and in what sense we should assume that if the elements of compounds were not indivisible and unchangeable, they—or everything, or the elements and hence everything—would be "destroyed into not-being." The interpretation closest to hand is to assume that Epicurus here envisages a kind of "being pulverized into nothingness" as the result of division going on ad infinitum.[19] Strictly speaking, however, such a claim would be mistaken: infinite division implies that the parts can become smaller and smaller, not that they eventually disappear.

A more sophisticated argument might be reconstructed on the basis of the example offered by Democritus, rendered and discussed by Aristotle in *On Generation and Corruption* 1.2 (316a10–b17).[20] Epicurus's version of this dilemmatic argument might have run as follows: on the assumption that a body is infinitely divisible, what would be left when we have division *everywhere* at the same time? Obviously not extension, for that could in its turn be further divided. Nor something of a nature other than extension (a point, or a quality). For extension is not built up from anything other than extension. So, we may well have to conclude this: nothing—a *reduction ad absurdum* of the idea of infinite divisibility. But also, on this interpretation we do not get a convincing argument, if only because, as Aristotle pointed out in his discussion of Democritus's version (317 a1–12), infinite divisibility merely implies the possibility of division *anywhere*, not *everywhere* at the same time. More importantly, it does not seem to fit the way Epicurus uses similar paradoxes to prove the existence of theoretical minima (on which see §6). For, in that context, he rather seems to locate the absurdity of infinite division in the fact that the parts *retain* extension. Finally, there is no trace of this argument in the more extensive set of arguments provided by Lucretius (1, 503–98; LS 9B).

So perhaps we should locate the nub of Epicurus's argument still elsewhere, as has been suggested by Gábor Betegh.[21] He has proposed a powerful alternative reconstruction, which no longer turns on the conceptual problems inherent in infinite *divisibility*, but gives the argument a more properly physical turn by focusing instead on the required *unchangeability* of the ultimate parts—an unchangeability which includes, but is not

confined to, indivisibility.[22] A clue for such an interpretation can be found in a later passage from the letter, which discusses the properties of the atoms, and which offers a useful parallel to our passage from *Ep. Hdt.* 40:

> For all qualities change, but the atoms do not change in any respect, since something solid and indestructible must persist when compounds are dissolved, which can make it so that changes are not to and from not-being, but happen through transpositions in many things, certain things also being added, and certain others subtracted. Hence those things which do not admit transposition are
> p. 87 necessarily ↳ indestructible, and do not have the nature of the changing, but their peculiar masses and shapes must persist—for this is necessary as well.
>
> (*Ep. Hdt.* 54; LS 12D)

The first sentence refers to the first two principles of conservation, which exclude, as we saw, change from and into not-being. The second sentence seems to claim that, in order to avoid the latter, the atoms must retain their masses and shapes. But how are the two subjects linked: how would a change of one of these atomic properties involve change into not-being?

According to Betegh, the link is provided by Epicurean metaphysics, which treats bodies as bundles of both intrinsic and accidental properties, of which the former constitute the essence of the body (on which see §7). Losing any of these essential properties means that the object at issue ceases to exist as what it was. In the case of macroscopic bodies, this does not involve a change into not-being, but merely a rearrangement of the constituent elements (atoms). In the case of the elements themselves, no such future is conceivable. In losing an essential property, they would simply be annihilated. Therefore, Epicurus's atoms cannot lose their shape, size (or "mass" as our text calls it), or weight.

This is an ingenious interpretation, but doubts remain as to the presupposed "metaphysical" threat of annihilation. First of all, the text contains no explicit reference to this metaphysical argument, and to my knowledge no Epicurean text or other ancient source makes the connection between atomicity and the metaphysics of properties. Moreover, the text of *Ep. Hdt.* 54 rather seems to link the risk of annihilation, in line with the first principles of conservation, with a *physical* factor: the lack of anything that persists (we may recall Lucretius's criticisms of Heraclitus). Hence, yet another way to reconstruct the underlying argument might be the following. As we already saw, the only forms of substantial or qualitative change that are allowed on the basis of the principles of conservation are changes that can be reduced to a rearrangement of persisting elements (or to the addition and subtraction of such persisting elements). In the case of the elements themselves, such changes through rearrangement of parts cannot be plausibly envisaged, because they would in that case no longer be elements, but would be as "weak" as phenomenal bodies. Moreover, their division would have no end, thus thwarting a coherent notion of persistence.[23] So we need something solid and full to survive change, a point where division ends. The atom fulfills this function in that it for sure has minimal parts, established on independent grounds (see §6), but these parts can no longer be rearranged.[24]

It is true that on this interpretation we are somehow back at the notion of things, on the opponents' view, "being pulverized into not-being." Yet, it is hard to deny that Epicurus was somehow committed to this idea anyway: witness *Ep. Hdt.* 56 (LS 9A): "to waste existing things into not-being." Moreover, this interpretation, with the help of *Ep. Hdt.* 54, no longer connects this idea with the unsatisfactory argument that an ongoing
p. 88 division would equal a division into nothingness, but rather with the more intelligible ↳ claim that such an ongoing division would fail to leave us with a satisfactory idea of persistence.

A different type of argument for atomism is rendered by Lucretius 1.503–10 (LS 8B). It has no parallel in *Ep. Hdt.* but has sometimes been brought in connection with the argument of *Ep. Hdt.* 40–1, in so far as it may be taken to explain the required solidity or fullness of the atom that is mentioned there.[25] Because void (in the strict sense of empty space) and body mutually exclude each other, void cannot have parts that are body, and,

likewise, body cannot have parts that are void. Hence, body must be indivisible, for physical divisions can only be made where there is void. So, compound bodies can be divided, but the elements (atoms) cannot.

Note that both the argument in Epicurus and the one offered by Lucretius appear to have been conceived from an "internalist" point of view, and, on any interpretation, presuppose various other aspects of Epicurean physics or metaphysics. This also goes, for example, for Lucretius's critique of earlier non-atomist materialists (Heraclitus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras), which can be usefully compared in this connection. This casts doubt on the notion that Epicurus is committed to a linear argumentative presentation of his philosophy. In fact, it appears that we do not have a completely satisfactory Epicurean argument for atomism, if by that we mean an argument that (i) is fully general in its scope, (ii) does not presuppose any other aspect of Epicurean physics, and (iii) does not credit the opponents with views they are not committed to. But perhaps that would be too much to ask.

4. Space and Void

The argument in *Ep. Hdt.* for the existence of space as a second component of the universe, next to bodies, is also very compressed and has given rise to different interpretations:

> If there did not exist that which we call (*kenon*) "room" (*chôra*) and "intangible nature" (*anaphês phusis*), bodies would not have anywhere to be or to move through in the way they are observed to move.
>
> (*Ep*. *Hdt*. 40; LS 5A)[26]

A few striking features need to be noted. First, this argument concerns *phenomenal* bodies (i.e., bodies at the macroscopic scale)—atoms have not yet been mentioned or discussed. Second, it is not just about a condition for the *motion* of these bodies, but also about a condition for their *emplacement*. Both observations strongly suggest that we are dealing with an argument that is meant to establish the existence of space as an independent, three-dimensional entity that can be occupied or empty, rather than the existence of void in the strict sense of *empty* space. Third, the wording makes it very clear that Epicurus is at this stage not interested
p. 89 in terminological distinctions. We are talking ↳ about a "something" which can fulfill the two functions that have been mentioned—providing location for bodies as well as extension for them to move through—and that can be denoted by various names. This squares with the doxographical testimony of Aëtius (1.20.2; LS 5C), which claims that "Epicurus says that the difference between void, place and room is one of name."[27] That these terms have the same denotation is also confirmed by the testimony of Sextus Empiricus:

> Therefore one must grasp that, according to Epicurus, of "intangible nature," as he calls it, one kind is named "void," another "place," and another "room," the names varying according to the different ways of looking at it, since the same substance when empty of all body is called "void," when occupied by a body is named "place," and when bodies roam through it becomes "room." But generically it is called "intangible nature" in Epicurus' school, since it lacks resistant touch.
>
> (*M* 10.2; LS 5D)[28]

Lucretius's version (1.419–44; LS 5B) of the basic argument of *Ep. Hdt*. 40 is closely parallel, and thus confirms this general picture, in so far as he as well suggests that we are dealing with a condition for emplacement as well as motion of bodies, and in so far as he as well suggests that we are dealing with one entity called by different names: "place (*locus*) and room (*spatium*) which we call 'void' (*inane*)"—elsewhere he also characterizes this entity as "intangible" (*intactile*, 1.437; *intactus*, 1.334).[29]

On this reading, Epicurus does not in this context offer anything like a separate proof for the existence of void in the sense of "empty space." We just have bodies and space. Presumably the fact that space can also be empty is here taken for granted as something which simply follows once we have established the existence of atoms (for the spaces through which the atoms move must be strictly empty). Lucretius, however, in an earlier section (1.334–90; LS 6A), does provide separate arguments for the existence of void. The most important one concerns the motion of phenomenal bodies, in so far as these are considered not in their phenomenal aspect, but as what they basically are: "clouds of atoms" separated by empty space. He argues that it is only when thus conceived that such bodies can be thought to be able to move at all, for a world consisting of tightly packed atoms would not allow such a thing. It is empty space that provides them with a "first start of motion" (*initum movendi*, 1.383). He then adds some less than clinching empirical arguments based on the phenomena of permeation and relative weight (1.346–69; LS 6A), which are supposed to prove the existence of internal void pockets in phenomenal bodies.

It is important to see that these separate arguments for the existence of void or empty space in Lucretius do not replace but supplement the basic argument for the existence of space as such as a second component of the universe in *Ep. Hdt.* 40 (and in the parallel passage in Lucretius 1.419–44; LS 5B). For even if *empty* space is required at the microscopic level for atoms to move *into*, space as such remains the extension "*in which* bodies are and *through which* they move hither and thither" (*in quo sita sunt et qua diversa moventur*, 1.421).

There is a complicating factor, however. Long and Sedley are probably right in claiming that Epicurus was the first ancient thinker to have isolated a notion of space.[30] However, I would add that he did so primarily by stressing the common denotation of the various spatial terms, and only secondarily by coining the new term "intangible nature." For in general, the way in which Epicurus used these spatial terms in practice appears to have been less neat than the evidence of Sextus suggests.[31] In fact, in denoting the whole of space he tends not to use his newly coined and rather artificial "intangible nature," but to prefer the much more common word "void" (*kenon*), just as the early atomists had sometimes done, by the way, probably on the basis of the consideration that space is, when taken "in itself," empty.[32] As a result, in Epicurus as in Lucretius, we find the notions of void in the broad sense (as space) and in the narrow sense (as unoccupied space separating the atoms) closely juxtaposed with one another. Similarly, when we are dealing with the claim that the universe consists of body and void, this claim can be worked out either by sketching the universe as the sum total of full and empty extension (the latter being void in the narrow sense), or by sketching it as the sum total of two functionally differentiated entities: body as that which can act and be acted upon, and space (void in the broad sense) as that which can provide room for things (for these two perspectives provided in immediate succession, see Lucretius 1.433–9 and 1.440–4, both in LS 5B).

Some modern interpretations have either overlooked or denied the coexistence of these two perspectives and have claimed that Epicurus did not have a separate conception of space as a self-subsistent three-dimensional extension. Thus, Brad Inwood argued that "void is accepted as the absence of body, but not … as the unoccupied part of an extended space."[33] So in his view, Epicurus does appear to have a concept of void, but not one of space. David Konstan, by contrast, does credit Epicurus with a concept of space or place—in fact, with a rather innovative one—by claiming that for Epicurus space *is* the void surrounding matter: "space is where matter is not." Thus, in his view, bodies (atoms) do not *occupy* parts of space, but are *surrounded by* space (which, again, is the void): space is "circumambient" and never itself occupied. As the atoms move, this space is being permanently "reconfigured."[34]

Apart from the fact that the conception of space which Konstan ascribes to Epicurus—space as "never occupied" and as "where matter is not"—is intuitively perhaps not the most appealing one, this interpretation faces considerable difficulties. First of all, it cannot make sense of the fact that, as we saw, Epicurus bases his argument on the need of *phenomenal* bodies, not atoms, to have something to be in and to move through. The spatial concepts at issue, in other words, should be applicable both at the phenomenal and at the atomic level; and for phenomenal bodies this conception of space as a surrounding void does not appear to work. Second, it

does not make the most natural sense of Epicurus's (and Lucretius's) claims that bodies need something to be "in" and to move "through," which seem to suggest that this something can be at least temporarily occupied; and it certainly cannot accommodate Lucretius's talk of bodies that "fill and hold places" (*quae loca complerent quaecumque tenerent*) in 1.522, or his talk, in the course of his explanation of magnetism (6.1005), of space being
p. 91 "emptied" (*inanitur spatium*) ↳ and place "becoming void" (*locus vacefit*). Third, on this conception of the void, it is hard to see its "yielding," and its supposedly being "reconfigured" around moving atoms as anything else than as being acted upon or even moving (after all, the void "replaces" the atoms as they move). In Epicurean physics, however, these are the prerogatives of body, not of void (*Ep. Hdt.* 67). Finally, this interpretation must assume that not only Sextus but also other participants in the ancient debate on space and void completely misunderstood Epicurus's position in ascribing to him the conception of space as an infinite three-dimensional extension that can be occupied or empty.[35]

We may connect this discussion about the nature of space with the Epicurean arguments for its infinity. Epicurus's universe is infinite in extent, for in order to be finite it must have an extremity, and an extremity is always "viewed as next to some further thing" (*Ep. Hdt.* 41; LS 10A). However, there is nothing next to the universe (since everything is by definition contained in it: it is called "the whole," Gr. *to pan*), hence the universe does not have an extremity, hence no limit. Lucretius (1.969–83; LS 10B) uses what is basically a more picturesque version of the same argument to establish the infinity of space (*spatium*).[36] He visualizes the situation by using a kind of thought experiment which Eudemus (quoted by Simplicius *In Phys.* 467.26–32) ascribed to the Pythagorean Archytas: wherever you hypothesize the boundary to be, you can imagine hurling a javelin outward from there. Now whether this javelin can fly unhindered through empty space or whether it will be obstructed by something, it will turn out that your starting point was not the boundary of space (*non est a fine profectum*, 979). For in the former case there was no boundary whatsoever, in the latter case there was a boundary of *empty* space, but not of space as such.

Epicurus goes on (*Ep. Hdt.* 42) to conclude that the number of atoms must be infinite as well. This he does by elimination, through contestation, of the opposite view: if the void were unlimited and bodies limited, bodies would move in scattered fashion without encountering collisions. On the other hand, if we had a limited void and an infinite number of bodies, bodies "would not have anywhere to be" (*Ep. Hdt.* 42). The latter formula suggests, once again, that the void is here taken in the broad sense as that which has to, but in the case envisaged cannot, *contain* the infinity of bodies (i.e., as a space or place for them), rather than in the narrow sense of *empty* space.[37]

5. Atoms in Space

This brings us to the subject of atomic motion. Through the infinite space, Epicurus's atoms are forever moving, as was indeed the case with the atoms in the system of Democritus. However, there are a few not insignificant innovations.

First of all, Democritus claimed that the atoms moved in all possible directions and that this needed no explanation, because it had been like that forever. In such cases, he argued, it is pointless to ask for a cause, for "what is infinite has no beginning" (Aristotle *GA* 742b20–2). Aristotle, who is our source here, was critical of
p. 92 this view, believing ↳ himself that even an eternal motion needed an explanation.[38] It may be for this reason that Epicurus came up with a primary cause for the motion of the atoms through the void: their weight (which he added to the two basic properties with which also Democritus had endowed the atoms: size and shape). Their weight endows the atoms with a primary, "natural" downward motion through the void. This natural motion is not, as in Aristotle, part of a teleologically structured world system. Yet, from the point of view of Epicurean epistemology, its existence can be justified by an (admittedly rather crude) empirical generalization from the observed downward motion of bodies with weight in the phenomenal world. This primary motion of

the atoms provides the infinite void, which is itself isotropic (i.e., has no directions), with the directions "up" and "down."

Collisions are another factor, next to weight, which determines atomic motion. Collisions do not change the speed, but only the direction of the motion of the atoms. Perhaps at the time of writing the *Letter to Herodotus* Epicurus thought weight and collision were sufficient to explain atomic motion, given that there had been no beginning to motion. For there is no sign there of the third factor, mentioned in other sources (including Lucretius 2.216–50; LS 11G), viz. the atomic swerve, a second innovation with regard to the system of Democritus. Weight alone, it is there argued, would make the atoms move downward, at equal speed, in exactly parallel trajectories, so that it becomes unclear how collisions can ever occur. Hence the assumption that the atoms, at unpredictable moments and for no particular reason, slightly swerve. As an "uncaused motion" this swerve was widely ridiculed by opponents. Because of its strangeness, it has often been taken to have been introduced as an ad hoc move, to avoid a form of physical and psychological determinism (on which see Warren, this volume). Although it is crucial to Epicurean physics that the universe does in fact exhibit physical regularities—think of the three principles of conservation (§2)—the introduction of the swerve brings in an element of indeterminacy, perhaps motivated by the idea that at the phenomenal level of everyday life we seem to experience not only physical necessity, but also chance events (see, e.g., *Ep. Men*. 133; LS 20A).

Since atoms do not differ qualitatively, their weight must be a function of their size. But although weight is a cause of motion, at the atomic level differences in weight do not cause differences in speed: due to the void's offering no resistance, all bodies move at the same high speed. At the phenomenal level, falling bodies do exhibit differences in speed proportionate to their weight, their weight allowing them in various measures to overcome the resistance of the medium (Lucretius 2.230–9; LS 11H). The speed of atoms through the void, however, is "unimaginable." They travel even faster than light (Lucretius 2.141–64; LS 11C).

When they become entangled in a compound, the atoms keep their very high speed, but they now move to and fro in all possible directions, colliding and bouncing back all the time. The fact that phenomenal compound bodies can be seen to move in only one direction at a time is due to the fact that their atoms predominantly
p. 93 move in that direction, but they all keep "oscillating" within the compound. The perceived ↳ continuous motion of the whole in one direction is thus the aggregate result of an incredibly large number of discontinuous stretches of motion in all directions at the atomic level.

6. Minimal Parts

A third important innovation in the Epicurean variant of atomism is its theory of minimal parts. The atoms differ from each other in shape and size. This must mean that, although they are physically indivisible, they are nevertheless divisible in theory, or conceptually. After all, we should be able to say by how much—i.e., by which part or parts—one atom is larger than another. However, Epicurus claims that this conceptual or theoretical divisibility has its limit as well and cannot go on to infinity. There are theoretically minimal parts within the atoms. By thus coming up with an innovative distinction between what, following a common practice, I here call "physical" and "conceptual" divisibility, and a corresponding two-tier theory of physically indivisible entities (atoms) on the one hand, and conceptually indivisible entities (minimal parts) on the other, he is able to avoid some of the ambiguities and inconsistencies that appear to have characterized fifth century atomism in this respect.[39]

The terms "physical" and "conceptual" divisibility are of course anachronistic, but they can be usefully applied to characterize the *method* of division that is at stake.[40] Physical division is what Epicurus, in the passage we are about to discuss, calls "cutting," while theoretical division is what he calls "traversing." The words he uses for conceptual minima are "smallest entities" (*elachista*) or "partless entities" (*amerê*).

The main piece of evidence is Epicurus's *Letter to Herodotus* 56–9 (LS 9A). It is mainly thanks to David Furley's pivotal analysis in his *Two Studies on the Greek Atomists* that many of its textual and interpretational problems have been solved, or at least charted, and that a number of previous interpretations have been proved to be untenable.

The argument may be analyzed as follows:

> We must consider not only
>
> (i) that a finite body cannot be cut to infinity (for here, we may add, the atoms constitute the solid bedrock beyond which we cannot go); but also
>
> (ii) that a finite body allows no "traversal" to infinity, "not even through smaller and smaller parts."[41]

"Traversal" means mentally going through or enumerating (as opposed to physically "cutting off") all the parts in the body at issue. The words "to smaller and smaller parts" probably refer to a situation like that envisaged in (one reading of) Zeno's dichotomy paradox (DK29 A24), where the runner cannot cross a distance because he
p. 94 has to cross half the distance first, and then half of the remaining distance, and so on ad infinitum. ↳ The words "not even" may indicate that there are also more complicated cases such as the non-denumerable infinity involved in the division envisaged below in (v).

> The reasons to affirm (ii) are:
>
> (iii) such a traversal (presumably: through smaller and smaller parts) cannot itself be conceived;
>
> (iv) an infinite number of parts with extension would involve an infinite magnitude of the body as a whole (the application of an idea prominent in another of Zeno's paradoxes [DK29 B1]);
>
> (v) the extremity (say a surface of a cube) can be distinguished, but on the opposed view one would have to be able to move inward from this outer surface to its immediate neighbor, and so on ad infinitum, which is impossible.

If this analysis is correct, the argument thus far offers the denial of the possibility of traversing either a denumerable (iii) or a non-denumerable (v) infinity of parts, while in addition (iv) exploring the idea that the parts, qua parts, should have extension, so that an infinite number of them would create an infinitely large whole. There follows no explicit conclusion that, hence, there must be conceptually minimal parts. Instead, these highly theoretical arguments are followed by an appeal to perceptual minima: there are minimal parts in what we can perceive as well, and these provide an *analogon* for what is the case at the invisible level of the atoms.

The analogy covers two aspects. In the first place, the perceptible minimum is of the same nature as bodies that still have denumerable parts, in that it has extension, yet it differs in having no such perceptibly denumerable parts. When because of the resemblance with these larger bodies we sometimes *think* we can discern its parts, we are mistaking the minimum itself, or its neighbor, for a part. In a similar way, the conceptual minimum in the atom must have extension, but no conceivable parts. Second, we see the perceptual minima neither as coinciding, nor as touching each other (for in both cases they would need to have limits, and thus parts), but "in their own way" (*Ep. Hdt.* 58) figuring as a measure for the whole thing of which they are part. So, also the conceptual minima in the atom can be thought to have their own way of being successive, which is different from being continuous and also different from being contiguous. Epicurus thus provides a way out of the quandary that Aristotle had sketched for those who had upheld the notion of conceptual minima (*Phys.* 6.231a26–9, on which see §1): how do they relate? The answer is that they have their own way of being successive, a way which Epicurus does not so much explain or define, but, in a way, shows by example.

Finally, we are told that the minima do not together *constitute* the body of which they are parts, in the way that atoms constitute compounds. Nor are they capable of moving on their own. In making the latter claim, Epicurus clearly departs from Diodorus's conception of minima, as "units" exhibiting staccato "jerks," and appears to side with Aristotle (*Phys*. 6.240b8–12), according to whom minimal parts can only be conceived of as moving incidentally (*kata sumbebêkos*) with the body of which they are part.

p. 95 Long and Sedley seem to be right in pointing out that Epicurus does not appear to regard the analogy as an independent proof for the existence of minima, as it is presented by Lucretius 1.746–52 (LS 9B).[42] But I doubt whether they are right in claiming that the proof itself is concluded with (iii), (iv), and (v). In Epicurus, as we saw, claims about non-evident things (*adêla*) always need to be grounded somehow in experience, either through contestation (*antimarturêsis*) of the opposite view, or, in most cases, through non-contestation (*ouk antimarturêsis*) of the claim itself by pointing out analogous phenomena in the domain of the visible. Since the arguments (iii), (iv), and (v) are all of a conceptual nature, an additional non-contestation of the claim itself by an appeal to an analogous phenomenon in the sensible realm appears to be called for. The *analogon* illustrates the very idea of the impossibility of further division at some point, the idea of extension without parts, and the idea of succession without touching. It thus completes the argument of (iii), (iv), and (v).

In this section of the *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus has been arguing for minimal parts in *bodies*—i.e., in atoms. None of his surviving writings, nor any passage in Lucretius, contains any unambiguous reference to minimal parts in other extended entities—i.e., in space or time—or to the kind of "jerky," discontinuous, motion that we encountered in Diodorus Cronus's theory of minima.[43] Sextus Empiricus (*M* 10.142–54), however, ascribes to "the Epicureans" the view that not only body, but also space and time are reducible to indivisible magnitudes; and Simplicius, probably following Themistius (the relevant texts are printed as Usener 278) does so as well, sketching a resulting theory of discontinuous motion, involving the paradoxical claim that a body as a whole can be said to be moving over a set of indivisible places or distances, while each of its constituent minimal parts can each time only be said to "have moved" over the relevant minimum. The Neoplatonist Simplicius, writing more than nine centuries after Epicurus, is not the safest of sources on a subject like this, but Sextus is in general well-informed about the tenets of the Hellenistic schools. So, there is a real possibility that either Epicurus himself in one of his lost later writings, or one of his successors, worked out the theory of minima in such a way that it included atoms of time and space.

Such a development may have taken place under the fresh influence of Diodorus Cronus, but in a sense it was also a natural one. If Epicurus used a version of Zeno's dichotomy paradox ("the stadium"), which is basically about traversing a spatial distance, to establish the existence of minimal parts within an atom, he could certainly at least as well use it to establish the existence of minimal parts in any stretch of space over which a particular atom would be moving, like the runner in Zeno's stadium. Moreover, leaving space infinitely divisible —once atomic magnitude had been quantized into minima—would create its own paradoxes, e.g., that a minimum would be able to move half its length in space. And once space was quantized into minima as well, the stretch of time which the fastest moving object, an atom, would need to traverse (or to "have traversed") a minimal part of space could easily count as the minimum unit of time.

This is not to say that a theory of parallel minima in atoms, space, motion and time would be without difficulties. It would involve new paradoxes of the kind of Zeno's "moving rows" (DK29 A28): two minima moving in opposite directions will pass each other in half the (presumably, minimal) time required to pass a
p. 96 minimum that is at rest. ↳ Sextus, in opposing the "Epicurean" view, comes up with another one (*M* 10.144–7): suppose two rows of minima moving at equal speed, but from opposite directions, over a row of nine static minimal spaces or places. What will happen when, after four time-units, they have each passed four space-units and only have the last middle unit between them? Will they (absurdly) stop moving, will one of them (equally absurdly) stop to give precedence to the other? Or will they meet, after half of a time unit in the middle of the last space unit, thus ignoring the atomic structure of both space and time?

The Epicurean rejection of the infinitely divisible continuum can of course be regarded as a rejection of the principles of contemporary (Euclidean) geometry. And indeed, our sources provide us with some traces of a later debate between Epicureans and Stoics on these principles (Posidonius fr. 46 and 47 EK). Whether at the end of the day the school had a single recognizable view of mathematics and whether members developed an anti-Euclidean alternative geometry, is hard to make out on the basis of the scanty evidence and cannot be discussed here.[44]

7. Properties and Time

Another area where Epicurus departs from the philosophy of Democritus is his theory of properties.[45] According to Epicurus, the only per se existents are bodies and space (or void). Bodies include both the atoms and the macroscopic bodies that are consistently represented as aggregates of atoms (not, as is sometimes supposed, of atoms and void). All other aspects of the world are properties of these per se existents. Such properties or attributes (*sumbebêkota*) can be permanent, accompanying the existent at issue for as long as it exists, together defining the thing's essential nature; others are temporary and hence less essential. Sextus Empiricus, paraphrasing the Epicurean Demetrius of Laconia (c. 100 BCE), provides some examples:

> What exists per se are things like substances, namely body and void, while what are viewed as belonging to per se things are what they call "attributes" (*sumbebêkota*). Of these attributes, some are inseparable from the things of which they are the attributes, others are of a kind to be separated from them. Inseparable from the things of which they are the attributes are, for example, resistance from body and non-resistance from void. For body is inconceivable without resistance, and so is void without non-resistance: these are permanent attributes of each—resisting of the one, yielding of the other. Not inseparable from the things of which they are attributes are, for example, motion and rest. For compound bodies are neither always in ceaseless motion nor always at rest, but sometimes have the attribute of motion, sometimes of rest—although the atom in itself is in everlasting motion, since it must approach either void or body; and if it should approach void, it moves through it because of its non-resistance, while if it should approach body, it ricochets and moves away from it because of its resistance. Hence these things, accompanied by time, are accidents (*sumptômata*).
>
> (*M* 10.220–3; LS 7C)[46]

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Inseparable attributes of atoms are shape, size, and weight (*Ep. Hdt.* 54; LS 12D) as well as, we may presume, attributes dependent on these (motion on weight, conceptual divisibility on size, resistance on shape). Macroscopic bodies, being clusters of atoms, also have these properties (though not necessarily as inseparable), but in addition may have lots of other properties, such as color or temperature, that we do not find at the atomic level. It is sometimes claimed that Epicurean atoms have no accidents or non-essential attributes.[47] It is however hard to see why this would be the case (position and collision seem to be obvious candidates), and the text adduced in support of this claim (*Ep. Hdt.* 70; LS 7B) rather seems to claim that accidents of phenomenal bodies do not exist at the atomic level: the atoms of the sea are not blue (Lucretius 2.772–3; LS 12E), and the atoms of my body do not laugh along when I am laughing (also a Lucretian image: 2.979–80).

At the macroscopic level, the examples mentioned by Epicurus and Lucretius include not only what we might call intrinsic qualities (weight in a stone) but also qualities that are (at least in part) dependent on the observer. Since Locke, the latter class has often been labeled "secondary qualities." Democritus had taken the view that such secondary qualities are unreal and merely subjective constructions projected by the sense-organs on what are in fact just sets of atoms. Or as one of his most famous *mots*, quoted by Sextus (*M* 7.135; DK68 B9), puts it, "by convention sweet, by convention bitter, by convention hot, by convention cold, by convention colour: but in reality atoms and void."

This view that permanent qualities at the macroscopic level are not real is one of the views which, without mentioning names, Epicurus firmly rejects in the relevant passage of the *Letter to Herodotus* (68–9; LS 7B); other wrongheaded views he mentions are (i) that these qualities exist on their own, (ii) that they are incorporeal accompaniments of body, and (iii) that they are parts of the body. Instead, they must be regarded as a bundle of features, which can each be focused on in separation, but which each presuppose the bundle as a whole, and together constitute the *phusis* (nature) of the thing at issue (*Ep. Hdt.* 69). It looks as if Epicurus grounds their reality in the fact that they are able to affect their surroundings—either intrinsically (think of the physical effects of heat) or by being perceived (think of sweet things causing pleasant sensations). After all, the reality of bodies themselves is connected to their being able to act or to be acted upon (Lucretius 1.440–4; LS 5B). Apparently, this link can be extended to their properties as well, even to properties that are relative to their perceivers (on which see the interesting passage from Polystratus's *On Irrational Contempt* printed as LS 7D).

Time is a special case, mentioned in the final sentence of our quotation from Demetrius of Laconia. It is said to "accompany" the accidental properties of motion and rest of macroscopic bodies, presumably as the dimension of their change and succession. We "associate it with and measure it against" (*Ep. Hdt.* 72, part of LS 7B) these changes (days, nights, motion, rest, presence or absence of feelings). Time is thus an "accident of accidents," in the words of Demetrius of Laconia (Sextus *M* 10.219; LS 7C). Presumably the idea is, though this is not spelled out, that we abstract time as a dimension of change, measure it against the changes we abstract it from, and then use it as a measure itself. As an "accident of accidents" it is not unreal, but it certainly cannot count as an existent sui generis, comparable to space.

A few final comments may be in order. First, as we already indicated on the basis of a passage from Polystratus (LS 7D), even when the effects of properties are relative—i.e., do not affect different people or different species in the same way (think of things tasting sweet to one person but not to another)—their effects are none the less real. For Epicureans this kind of relativism does not lead to skepticism.

Second, the properties of a phenomenal body have the power to affect us thanks to the (merely quantitative) properties and motions of the constituent atoms. So much, at least, is suggested by the type of examples adduced by Lucretius 2.381–407 (LS 12F). Whether this should be generalized into a form of overall reductionism, or whether Epicurus thought it possible that some composite bodies have specific properties over and above those caused by their elementary components, is controversial. David Sedley has argued that, in the case of mental properties, Epicurus put forward a doctrine of "emergent" properties with their own level of causal efficacy, independent of the constituent atoms, and even able to constrain those atoms in a form of top-down causation. Others have expressed doubts.[48]

Third, we should realize that Epicurus's stance on the reality of the properties of macroscopic bodies puts humans in a much better position to pursue the philosophical life than Democritean skepticism could do. It allows us to use perceptual evidence as a reliable basis on which to build our physical theories, and to use pleasure and pain as a reality-linked basis on which to build our ethics.

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Notes

1. See Plutarch *Non posse* 1100a; Cicero *Fin*. 1.17.

2. On Epicurus’s attitude toward his predecessors and on Timocrates’s polemics, see Sedley 1976.

3. Thus, Aristotle (*Phys*. 1.187a1–3) presents atomism as a way to answer the “argument from bisection,” which is probably a reference to Zeno’s paradox of the stadium (DK29 A25).

4. See Furley 1967 and Sorabji 1983. For the relation between Aristotle’s account and Zeno’s arguments against pluralism, see Furley 1967: 121–7, esp. 126 and 127.

5. The classic study is still Furley 1967, who seems to have assumed that Epicurus actually reacted to the text of the *Physics*. See further Sedley 1999: 374–9; and the comments in LS 41–5.

6. Overview in Verde 2013: 128–237.

7. On (the evidence on) Diodorus Cronus, see Sedley 1977; a more summary account in Sedley 1999: 356–62. On Diodorus’s “atomism,” see Denyer 1981.

8. For an analysis of the argument as presented by Sextus Empiricus, see Hankinson 2015.

9. Sedley (1998a: 128–32) has plausibly argued that the first 13 books of *On Nature* (with the *minima* discussed in Book 5),

which were epitomized in the *Letter to Herodotus*, were written in Lampsacus—i.e., before Epicurus entered the Athenian scene with his own school.

10. See previous footnote.

11. Contra Sedley 1999: 362–3.

12. On contestation (*antimarturêsis*) and non-contestation (*ouk antimarturêsis*), see Taylor, this volume.

13. Sedley 1998a: esp. 134–65.

14. For an overview and analysis of the various interpretations, see Brunschwig 1994. Unlike Brunschwig, I believe the "traditional" reading of this passage can be made sense of, along the lines suggested here in the text.

15. Translation of Inwood and Gerson 1994. LS 4A gives a different translation, taking the two sentences as two separate arguments and reading the second "for" as "and."

16. Of course, individual substances can also change through the *outflow* of matter, and Lucretius 3.814–7 (LS 14H) excludes this kind of change for the universe as well. But the asymmetry, on my reading, in the present (epitomizing) context need not worry us: after all, any conceivable new ingredients, apart from atoms and space, should come *from outside in*.

17. For Lucretius, the lines, "For if something changes and leaves its boundaries, that is immediately the death of the thing that it previously was" (LS 4D) were crucial enough to be used four times: 1.670–1; 792–3; 2.753–4; 3.519–20.

18. Translation of Inwood and Gerson 1994, taking *panta* as predicative ("if they are not all," rather than as introducing a new subject ("all things"), which is the translation of Long and Sedley (LS 5A) and Betegh (2009: 264).

19. Bailey 1928: 282; Sedley 1999: 372.

20. Translation and brief discussion in Sorabji 1987: 336–41. Extensive discussion in Sedley 2004.

p. 100 21. Betegh 2006.

22. We may note that the passage in *Ep. Hdt.* 40 speaks of bodies that are both atomic (*atoma*) and unchangeable (*ametablêta*).

23. This aspect of "weakness" is repeatedly stressed by Lucretius in his critique of non-atomist materialist philosophers (1.754, on Empedocles; 1.847, on Anaxagoras).

24. Lucretius 1.609–14 explicitly connects the "solid simplicity" of the atom with its minimal parts, and stresses that minimal parts are not the elements of the atom in the way atoms are the elements of larger bodies (1.611: *non ex illorum conventu conciliata*).

25. Sharples 1996: 33–6; Sedley 1998b: 133–4. Discussion in Betegh 2009: 272–7.

26. Translation of Long and Sedley, slightly altered. Inwood and Gerson translate *chôra* as "space," but *chôra* is not used as the most general term.

27. A comprehensive discussion of the evidence of Aëtius on spatial terms in Mansfeld 2014.

28. Translation of Long and Sedley, slightly altered.

29. On the Latin terminology in Lucretius, see Lévy 2014.

30. LS 30.

31. See Algra 1995: 54–5.

32. On the evidence on the early atomists, see Algra 1995: 44–52. Even the *kenômata* through which, according to the later Epicurean Philodemus (*Sign. 36*; LS 18G), we see phenomenal bodies moving must refer to "spaces" rather than to "empty spaces" (transl. Long and Sedley), for we do not actually see bodies moving through *empty* space in the strict sense.

Presumably they are called *kenômata* either because considered in themselves they are empty or because they are not yet occupied by the bodies about to move through them.

33. Inwood 1981: 75.

34. Konstan 2014; the quotations are from pp. 83 (“space is where matter is not”), 85 (“reconfigured”), 88 (“circumambient”), and 92 (“never occupied”).

35. See, e.g., the testimonies of Themistius and Simplicius printed together as Usener 273.

36. Discussion of various versions of the argument in Sorabji 1987: 125–41.

37. Note that, in the interpretation of Konstan (2014: 91–2), the ensuing absurdity has to be considerably reformulated: the void itself “shrinks to zero.”

38. Think of his own explanation of the eternal motion of the heavenly bodies by postulating a series of unmoved movers in *Metaphysics* 12.

39. On which see Sorabji 1983: 354–7.

40. Different view in Sorabji 1983: 352.

41. I side with the majority of scholars against Furley (1967: 8–14), who takes (i) to be about conceptual divisibility as well. The wording Epicurus uses (“cutting” and “grinding away existing things”) clearly suggests that he is thinking about the physical (in)divisibility of the atoms.

42. LS 42.

43. Unlike Sorabji 1983: 375, I do not see references to atomic times in *Ep. Hdt.* 47 or 62, nor in Lucretius 4, 794–6; see Verde 2013: 110–27.

44. But see Angeli and Dorandi 2008; and Verde 2013: 249–308.

45. Differing accounts in Furley 1983 and O’Keefe 1997. I largely side with the latter.

46. Translation of Long and Sedley, slightly altered.

47. LS 37; Sedley 1999: 381.

48. See Sedley 1988; contrast O’Keefe 2005.

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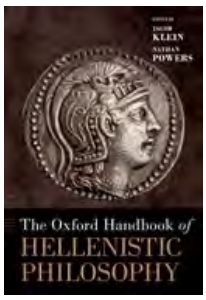
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CHAPTER

4 Order without Teleology: Epicurean Cosmogony, Theology, and Anthropology

Francesco Verde

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Abstract

This chapter deals with some of the central themes of Epicurean philosophy: cosmogony, meteorology, theology, psychology, and the origin of language. What links these different areas together is Epicurus' fundamental assumption that nature's order is not explained by intelligent design, teleology, or anthropocentric providence, but by formative principles intrinsic to its physical-atomic structure. In developing this view, Epicurus was both drawing upon the earlier atomism of Democritus and likely reacting to both Plato and Aristotle, whose natural philosophies regularly appeal to teleological modes of explanation. Epicurus responded to these ideas by theorizing a universe whose structure wholly depends on the interactions of atoms moving through the void.

Keywords: Epicurus, Epicurean, cosmogony, meteorology, theology, psychology, language, teleology, nature

Subject: Classical Philosophy, Philosophy

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In 2008, archaeological excavations at Oenoanda in ancient Lycia brought to light a new fragment from the Imperial Age Epicurean philosopher Diogenes of Oenoanda: "Although Plato was right to acknowledge that the world had an origin—even if he was not right to introduce a divine craftsman of it (*edêmiourgêsen*) instead of employing nature as its craftsman (*têi phusei dêmiourgôi*)—he was wrong to say that it is imperishable" (NF 155 = YF 200).[1] The fragment highlights a foundational principle of Epicurean cosmogony according to which nature produces things in an orderly fashion on the basis of atomist and materialist principles, apart from any providential intent or rational design.[2] This chapter explores the ways in which this fundamental tenet shapes the peculiar features of Epicurean meteorology, theology, psychology, and theory of language. In each of these

domains, the order of nature is not to be explained by appeal to a divine craftsman such as Plato's Demiurge or to teleological principles such as Aristotle's, but by formative principles intrinsic to a universe constituted by atoms moving without purpose through the void.

1. Cosmogony

Epicurean cosmogony is shaped by a distinctive understanding of infinity, one that characterizes both the essential elements of the universe and the interactions among them that give rise to an *orderly* world (*kosmos*).[3] First, the fundamental principles are themselves infinite, atoms being infinite in number (though they have a finite number of shapes) and void being infinite in extension. An infinity of atoms move continuously and
p. 104 eternally through an infinite void (cf. Epicurus *Hdt*. 41), and indeed Epicurus argues ↳ that it is impossible that either of these principles—void and atoms—be finite. If a finite void were matched with an infinite number of atoms, the atoms could not be contained; whereas if the opposite were true—if void were infinite in extent but atoms finite in number—atoms would seldom if ever collide. Under such conditions, atoms would wander discretely through an unbounded universe, without the collisions, reciprocal impacts, and variations of speed required for their aggregation into compound bodies (cf. *Hdt*. 42, and Diogenes of Oenoanda fr. 67 Smith).

A second feature of infinity in Epicurean physics appears in the so-called principle of "isonomy" (*isonomia*), a doctrine not found in the surviving works by Epicurus but reported by Cicero and Lucretius.[4] In the first book of Cicero's *De natura deorum* (1.19.50), the Epicurean spokesman Velleius, after emphasizing the "great power of infinity" (*summa vis infinitatis*), appeals to the principle of isonomy (in Latin, *aequabilis tributio*), which requires that, in a universe where atoms and void are infinite, everything answers equally to some corresponding thing (*omnia omnibus paribus paria respondeant*).[5] Thanks to Epicurean *isonomia*, there is some degree of regularity in the distribution of atoms and atomic shapes and therefore of types of worlds throughout infinite space. Cicero, moreover, enumerates two quite specific consequences of this principle: (1) that if there are many mortal beings, there are no fewer immortals; and (2) that if the causes of destruction are innumerable, so are those of conservation. In these claims, one can observe that isonomy is a distributive principle that applies to the contents of the universe as a whole.

The principle of isonomy appears to have had crucial implications for cosmology. In the *Letter to Pythocles* (88), Epicurus defines the world (*kosmos*) as a portion of heaven (*periochê … ouranou*) that includes stars, earth, and all other phenomena.[6] In §45 of the *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus states that the worlds are unlimited in number (*kosmoi apeiroi eisin*: cf. too *Pyth*. 89). Because the atoms are of infinite number, they are not exhausted by the formation either of one world or of a limited number of worlds; as they push forward into the infinite void, they continually aggregate to make new worlds.[7] Accordingly, since the atoms are of infinite number, the number of worlds is necessarily infinite as well. Moreover, when discussing the formation of worlds, Epicurus speaks of "certain appropriate seeds" (*epitêdeiôn tinôn spermatôn*: *Pyth*. 89), that is, of atoms whose shape is suitable for initiating the process of generating a world and, therefore, of generating life forms. This is an important explanatory claim, suggesting that the existence of one or more specific sorts of atoms, regularly distributed across the universe in accordance with the principle of isonomy, is responsible for the generation of worlds. The principle of isonomy shows that the Epicurean universe, though without any providential or teleological aspect, is not chaotic or disorderly but is in fact governed by a "law" that shapes it in a uniform manner.

Epicurus further maintains that, like all atomic aggregates, worlds themselves will eventually dissolve, some earlier (since their physical structure is less durable), others later (*Ep. Hdt.* 73–4). This claim both depends upon and underscores Epicurus's dramatic rejection of influential contemporary cosmological tenets: for example (as
p. 105 was previously mentioned), the view found in Plato's *Timaeus* that a divine craftsman orders ↳ the world to the benefit of humans, with the result that the world order persists eternally; the view—also found in the *Timaeus* (34b–37c) and in Stoicism—that the *kosmos* is animated by a divine "world-soul" (cf. too Aristotle *De cael.* II 3,

286a 7–12); and the view (shared by Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and certain traditional religious cosmologies) that the celestial bodies are really immortal deities.[8]

In Book 2 of the *De rerum natura* (167–81), Lucretius is sharp in his criticism of such providential or anthropocentric accounts, pointing to deficiencies in the order of nature that undermine belief in its providential design: "the nature of the universe has by no means been made for us through divine power: so great are the faults it stands endowed with" (*nequaquam nobis divinitus esse creatam / naturam mundi: tanta stat praedita culpa*, 2.180–1, trans. Rouse-Smith). These deficiencies appear to be a "fault"/ *culpa* (a term which chiefly refers to human responsibility and not to nature itself) only if we assume such a providential or anthropocentric point of view, which we ought not to do.[9] On the other hand, though reality does not exist for our sakes, it possesses an intrinsic order that can be essentially (but not in a deterministic way, as the existence of the *clinamen* and of *libera voluntas* shows) reduced to the laws governing the movement of atoms.[10]

Epicurus further rejects the idea that worlds are animated living beings, together with the suggestion that the gods may either be identified with or held responsible for the motions of the celestial bodies. To administer the perpetual motions of these bodies (however harmonious those motions may be) would not be in keeping with the everlasting tranquility the gods experience with utmost fullness (cf. *Hdt*. 76).[11] That which is incorruptible cannot be responsible for motion, nor for the generation and preservation of the *kosmos*, nor for the motions of the stars.

For Epicurus, then, a world is simply an atomic compound on a grand scale, subject to the same processes of generation and dissolution as all compounds: worlds do not necessarily have a single configuration (*schêmatismos*) but can be spherical, ovoid, or triangular (cf. *Pyth*. 88) as well as other shapes—albeit not every kind of shape (cf. *Hdt*. 74). Epicurus thereby rejects the "sphericity dogma" of the Platonic–Aristotelian cosmological tradition, according to which the sphere is the most perfect or the most beautiful of shapes (e.g., see Plato *Ti*. 33b and Aristotle *De cael.* II 2, 285a 32–b 1; II 3, 286a 10–12). It is not necessary for a *kosmos* to have a spherical shape since, to Epicurus's eyes, this shape possesses the same "dignity," so to speak, as the triangle and ovoid. On the other hand, because atoms, though infinite in number, have a limited number of shapes (cf. *Hdt*. 42), the number of world shapes too must be limited. The basis of these doctrines is Epicurus's view about the way in which *kosmoi* are formed: just as there is no "privileged" atomic form, so there is no "preferred" form of *kosmos*. Obviously, this view does not exclude the possibility that, given the number and nature of atomic types, some world shapes (such as the spherical one) will occur more frequently than others.

In framing this account, Epicurus both draws upon the earlier atomist cosmology of Democritus and departs from it in key respects. Thus, Epicurus accepts Democritus's doctrine of infinite *kosmoi*, thereby rejecting the view, common to Plato and Aristotle, that our *kosmos* is unique, unitary, and eternal, constituted from and
p. 106 containing within ↳ itself all matter in existence. What is eternal, according to Epicurus, is not our own *kosmos* or any of the other *kosmoi*, but the constituent elements of the whole universe: atoms and void. Atomic aggregates (including each individual *kosmos*) are without exception generated and corruptible.[12] On the other hand, Epicurus rejects the theory of a unique cosmogonic vortex that sets atoms in motion and plays a central role in the cosmology of the earlier Greek atomists (though see note 13). Diogenes Laertius (DL 9.45 = DK 68 A 1 = LM VII 27 D13) reports that, according to Democritus, everything is produced according to necessity (*kat' anagkên*) in that the cause of the formation of all things is vortex itself (*dinê*), which he calls necessity. Leucippus similarly believed that everything strongly depends on the role of necessity (*panta ... hup' anagkês*: Aëtius *Plac*. I 25.4 [*Doxographi Graeci* 321, Mansfeld and Runia 655] = DK 67 B 2 = LM VII 27 D73). On this account, vortex is identified with physical necessity and determines the organization of atomic aggregations on the basis of atoms' shapes and magnitudes (cf. DL 9.30–3 = DK 67 A 1 = LM VII 27 D80b). By contrast, Epicurus attributes the motion of atoms in general to their weight and to the result of collisions alone, rather than to their participation in a vortex; hence he also cannot accept the Democritean view of physical necessity.[13] The rejection of the theory of the vortex and the consequent denial of determinism/necessitarianism are significant departures from Democritean cosmogony.[14]

As a final point, the limited number of world shapes is due to the limited number of atomic shapes, which is in turn due to the existence of minimal atomic parts (cf. *Hdt*. 56–9).[15] This point entails very specific consequences: the limited number of world shapes shows that the probability of there being in infinite time worlds similar to ours—that is, *kosmoi* in which the generation of life is possible—is much higher than in those cosmologies (such as that of Democritus) which seem to posit an unlimited number of atomic shapes and so to admit an infinite number of world shapes.[16]

2. Meteorology

Epicurus's *Letter to Pythocles* takes as its subject *ta meteôra*: celestial phenomena, broadly understood (including what we would properly call atmospheric and meteorological phenomena). In all likelihood, as has recently been demonstrated, Epicurus partially used the doxographies of the Peripatetic tradition (especially those compiled by Theophrastus) as sources of information about the generation of these phenomena.[17] The "scientific" method that Epicurus exhibits in this text has two especially noteworthy features. First, the study of these phenomena is not a sterile theoretical enterprise: rather, as Karl Marx observed, the causes of *ta meteôra* are investigated by Epicurus for ethical purposes, to remove fear of the gods and so remove an obstacle to tranquility.[18] Second, Epicurus attributes several alternative causes of generation to each sort of celestial phenomenon that he considers: this is the method of "multiple explanations" (*pleonachos tropos*: cf. *Hdt*. 80; *Pyth*. 87). Epicurus holds that, in contrast to investigation of the basic principles of reality—which admits of only one causal story that is ultimately ↳ compatible with the phenomena we observe (cf. *Pyth*. 86)— p. 107 investigation of celestial phenomena (e.g., rain, hail, snow, and the rising and setting of the stars) requires that each be explained in multiple ways.[19]

To understand why Epicurus thinks this, we must look to a point that has been somewhat neglected by scholars. The method of multiple explanations is not based on mere conjecture (as Seneca claims: *NQ* VI 20, 5 = Usener 351), nor is it intended to compensate for an inability to explain celestial phenomena in a single rigorous manner. Rather, it is a direct and necessary consequence of the dictum (*Pyth*. 86) that we ought to pursue the science of nature (*phusiologêteon*) as the phenomena require (*hôs ta phainomena ekkaleitai*), together with the fact that, in the case of celestial phenomena, perception actually reveals multiple (and individually sufficient) causes of generation. Although the causes of celestial phenomena cannot be directly observed, Epicurus claims that we can analyze them scientifically on the basis of their "signs" (*sêmeia*): these will be events bearing some relevant similarity to the celestial phenomena in question but that occur more proximately to us, whose causes are therefore amenable to direct and immediate observation (*Pyth.* 87–8). If we transfer these causes by analogy to the celestial phenomenon under scrutiny, making sure that this analogical relation fully respects what is perceptually evident in the appearance (*phantasma*) of a celestial phenomenon, we will attain knowledge of this celestial phenomenon through the formulation of different explanations, all compatible and in agreement with the phenomenon. Briefly put, the multiple explanations depend on the multiple causes which actually generate the celestial phenomena.[20]

A useful example of this analogical process and its results is the treatment of the generation of thunder (*Pyth*. 100), for which Epicurus provides four distinct explanations. The phenomenon of thunder (its roar) can occur: (1) because wind becomes enclosed within clouds, as happens sometimes in wine vessels; (2) because the fire in clouds booms when fanned by winds; (3) because clouds rupture and break apart; and (4) because of friction when ice-like clouds collide. Epicurus offers these four different explanations as bearing direct comparison to familiar events we experience at close hand and as agreeing with the phenomena that are evident on the basis of sense-perception. Thus, explanations of celestial phenomena adhere to the criterion of truth for explanations in general, conforming to phenomena that are evident on the basis of sense-perception (cf. *Pyth*. 86).[21]

Though Epicurus was not the first to develop the theory of multiple explanations for meteorological phenomena (it is, indeed, very plausible that Aristotle and especially Theophrastus influenced him in this), the Epicurean *pleonachos tropos* is original in that, according to it, one can and should provide as many explanations as perceptual self-evidence allows for the occurrence of any individual (celestial) phenomenon.[22] Indeed, if we have available multiple suitable explanations of some celestial phenomenon but neglect one explanation in favor of another, we are abandoning the true science of nature. If explanations *a* and *b* explain the same *meteôron* (e.g., thunder) and agree equally with the phenomena, by ignoring or rejecting one of these explanations we tell an *arbitrary* story and fall directly into myth (*epi ton mython katarrhei*: cf. *Pyth.* 87).
p. 108 Agreement ↳ with the phenomena is thus a condition of the method of multiple explanations, as is the wholesale denial of divine or providential causes. If these conditions are not respected, the step to *religio* (in the worst sense of the term) and superstition is very short.

3. Theology

In a brief but dense passage of the *Letter to Menoeceus* (123–4), Epicurus summarizes the fundamental aspects of his theology:

> First, think of god as an imperishable and blessed (*aphtharton kai makarion*) living being (*zôon*), as the common idea of god (*hê koinê tou theou noêsis*) is in outline, and attach to him nothing alien to imperishability or inappropriate to blessedness, but believe about him everything that can preserve his combination of blessedness and imperishability. For there are gods (*theoi men gar eisin*)—the knowledge of them is self-evident (*enargês gar autôn estin hê gnôsis*). But they are not such as the many believe them to be. For by their beliefs as to their nature the many do *not* preserve them. The impious man (*asebês*) is not he who denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to gods the beliefs (*doxas*) of the many about them. For they are not preconceptions (*prolêpseis*) but false suppositions (*hupolêpseis pseudeis*), the assertions (*apophaseis*) of the many about gods. It is through these that the greatest harms, the ones affecting bad men, stem from gods, and the greatest benefits too. For having a total affinity for their own virtues, they are receptive to those who are like them, and consider alien all that is not of that kind.
>
> (LS 23B; trans. LS, slightly modified)

This text serves as a useful corrective to the perception, widespread both in antiquity and in the modern period, that Epicurus and his followers were atheists.[23] Epicurus's language is explicit here—"For there are gods (*theoi men gar eisin*)"—and it seems undeniable that here the verb *to be* (*einai*) has an existential sense, with Epicurus employing it to emphasize that the gods are indeed real physical entities. They are neither projections nor thought constructions developed by human beings, as some interpreters have argued.[24] Furthermore, that the gods exist is not merely assumed, but is rather a thesis that Epicurus takes to be supported by readily apparent perceptual evidence (*enargeia*). More specifically, Epicurus claims that our knowledge of the gods is underpinned by a "preconception" (*prolêpsis*), one of the criteria of truth of the Epicurean canonic (cf. DL 10.31). A preconception is an empirically formed concept, arising through repeated perceptions of a certain object that are then unified by the activity of reason.[25] In the case of the gods, these perceptions are not registered indirectly by specific sense-organs, but rather by the mind, which is itself able to perceive without the mediation of sense-organs.[26] The mind receives directly the images (*eidôla*; Latin *simulacra*) that flow from the atomic 'bodies' of the gods (cf. Lucretius *DRN* 5.1171; cf. too Sextus Empiricus *M* 9.25 = Usener 353 and Cicero *ND*
p. 109 1.16.43–20.56 = Usener 352).[27] The preconception of gods ↳ comprises (claims Epicurus in the text previously quoted in this chapter) those features that are necessary (and also essential) to their divine nature: being alive (a *zôon*), blessedness (*makariotês*), and imperishability (*aphtharsia*). Impiety, on the other hand, is a consequence of suppositions about them that are inconsistent with this preconception.

Importantly, the imperishability of the Epicurean gods must be understood in fully materialist and atomist terms: like all existing things, the gods are themselves atomic aggregates, though they are constituted in a way that is harmonious and free from every form of disturbance. This peculiarity of what Cicero calls the gods' *quasi corpus* (*ND* 1.71; cf. Philodemus *De diis* frr. 6–9 Diels) is due to the fact that the atoms which form them are continuously replaced, so that the gods never incur the physical corruption to which other sorts of atomic compounds are susceptible. As one reads in the treatise probably by the Epicurean Demetrius Lacon on the form of the god preserved by *PHerc.* 1055 (ed. Santoro 2000), the Epicurean gods are living, anthropomorphic beings (as they had already been portrayed in the Greek poetic and literary tradition).[28] They live eternally and blessedly in the *intermundia*/*metakosmia*, that is, in the great empty spaces between the worlds, and they are endowed with voices that they use in conversations, as we know from Hermarchus, the second scholarch of the Garden.[29] (Their location in the *intermundia* means that Epicurus strongly rejected "astral" theology: the gods are not identified with planets or stars and do not inhabit them.)

Thus, the gods, unlike all other living beings, do not experience the pain of physical dissolution. The first of Epicurus's *Key Doctrines* directly links this peculiarity of the gods to their blessedness: "That which is blessed and imperishable (*to makarion kai aphtharton*) neither suffers nor inflicts trouble, and therefore is affected neither by anger nor by favour (*oute orgais oute charisi*). For all such things are marks of weakness (*asthenei*)" (LS 23G; trans. LS 23E4; cf. Lactantius *De ira dei* 4.1 = Usener 365). Epicurus evidently takes this claim to be a conceptual truth, obtaining in virtue of the gods' invulnerable tranquility: anger and benevolence, along with various other attitudes and activities, can belong only to beings who, through weakness, must work to preserve themselves and ameliorate their lives. As Cicero observes through the Epicurean spokesman Velleius in the *De natura deorum* (1.51), an Epicurean god does nothing (*nihil enim agit*) and is not involved in any activity (*nullis occupationibus est inplicatus*) but enjoys his wisdom and virtue (*sua sapientia et virtute gaudet*) in a state of supreme and eternal pleasure, free from all pain and disturbance. In the *Letter to Herodotus* (§76–§77; LS 23C), Epicurus himself is clear about the cosmological and theological implications of this point. Celestial phenomena and the very constitution of the *kosmos* are not the products of divine action and, therefore, are not a manifestation of divine benevolence (or malevolence) toward humankind.[30]

One might think that the Epicurean ascription of inactivity to the gods impoverishes the very notion of divinity: already in antiquity such a theology was considered a narrowing-down of the conception of the divine, especially by comparison to the providentially active deity of the Stoics (cf. Cicero *ND* 1.20.52). Thus, in his reply to the Epicurean Velleius (Cicero *ND* 1.43.121), Cotta accuses Epicurus of eradicating *religio* (i.e., "religious" scruples and fears, or "superstition," the opposite of the Greek ↳ term *eusebeia*, corresponding to the Latin *pietas*) from the human soul, since he has removed any possibility that the gods might offer assistance or show benevolence (*opem et gratiam*). But Epicurus actually finds in the gods' inactivity grounds for attributing to them the highest honor and majesty: the imperishability and blessedness of the gods make their form of life ideal, a model of sagehood to which we must conform (cf. *PHerc*. 346 col. 7.8 Capasso). Epicurus would not agree with the accusation leveled against him by Cotta; he would object not only that he has written works *On the gods* (*Peri theôn*) and *On sanctity* (*Peri hosiotêtos*; cf. Cicero *ND* 1.41.115), but also that, so far from impoverishing the conception of the gods, he has in fact elevated that conception, showing the gods to be free from mortal labor and corruptibility.

It remains to consider the significance of this theology for Epicurus's philosophical system and for ethics in particular. Perhaps surprisingly, several names of Epicureans with priestly roles are attested (especially in inscriptions).[31] The crucial point is to understand why one would need to venerate gods who are as the Epicureans conceive them to be—as, indeed, Epicurus himself did and as he invited others to do (cf. DL 10.10, Philodemus *De piet.* Col. 31.879–89 Obbink = Arrighetti 114 = Usener 387, and the content of *POxy.* 215, esp. coll. 1 and 3 Obbink).[32] One plausible answer—which takes into account, on the one hand, the blessed and incorruptible life led by the anthropomorphic gods and, on the other hand, the Epicurean rejection of the notions of divine activity together with providence and divination—is that the gods (like Epicurean sages) are

exemplars, regulatory ideals to which one should try to conform. The conclusion of the *Letter to Menoeceus* (135) maintains that it will be possible for us, to the extent that we are free from disturbance, to live, as Epicurus puts it, "like a god among men" (*hôs theos en anthrôpois*).[33] If this Epicurean ideal of assimilation to the gods is to be taken seriously, as a means of achieving in our own existence the kind of life proposed by Epicurus, acquiring happiness through the enjoyment of pleasure and avoidance of pain (in our one and only life), it appears that the gods in question cannot be wholly distant or irrelevant deities.[34]

Although the role played by the gods in our world can only be ethical, it is important to note that Epicurus probably justified this role in physical and indeed empirical terms. Though they do not exercise providence (or display malice) with regard to the *kosmos*, it is not true that the Epicurean gods do not interact with our world at all: for *eidôla* that (involuntarily) flow from them impact our minds. As Cicero writes (*ND* 1.19.49), the mind turns to these atomic films or images "with the greatest pleasure" (*cum maximis voluptatibus*). At the beginning of Book 6 of the *De rerum natura*, moreover, Lucretius writes that unless one rejects unworthy thoughts about the gods, "you will not be able to approach their shrines with placid heart, you will not have the strength to receive with tranquil peace of spirit the images which are carried to human minds from their holy bodies (*de corpore … sancto simulacra feruntur*), declaring what the divine shapes are" (6.75–8; trans. after Rouse-Smith). Similarly, an important text by the Middle-Platonic philosopher Atticus (second half of the second century AD), transmitted by Eusebius (fr. 3, p. 48 63–5 des Places, *ap.* Eusebius *PE* 15.5.7 = Usener 385), maintains that
p. 111 Aristotle's rejection of providence must be considered even more impious than the same doctrine ↳ in Epicurus, on the grounds that according to Epicurus, humans derive *some* kind of benefit (*onêsis*) from the gods: their emanations (*aporrhoiai*, i.e., the divine *simulacra*) are "accessory causes" (*paraitiai*) of many goods for those who partake of them.

Finally, Diogenes of Oenoanda recommends that the aspiring Epicurean participate in prayer and religious ceremonies (fr. 19.II.6–11 Smith). We may speculate that he sees such ceremonies as an effective means to internalizing the divine *eidôla* and so pursuing the aim of living as a god among men. Of course, this does not mean that the gods are direct causes of our happiness: *ataraxia* depends exclusively on us. We must try to assimilate ourselves to the gods in our everyday life, since the divine condition does not differ in happiness (at least) from our own. But Epicurus's gods are nonetheless ethical models: their embodiment of happiness plays an indirect role in our progress toward assimilation to the divine (though without deliberate intent on their part) thanks to the benefits that their simulacra provide for us.[35] "The flesh's cry is not to be hungry or thirsty or cold. For one who is in these states and expects to remain so could rival even Zeus in happiness" (*Sententiae Vaticanae* 33; LS 21G1; trans. Long and Sedley).

4. Psychology

To understand Epicurean psychology, we must view it within the school's general materialist framework.[36] The *Letter to Herodotus*, §63–§64 provides the best introduction to Epicurus's doctrine of the soul:

> After these things, referring to sensations and affections—for so shall we have the surest ground for belief—we must consider that the soul is a body composed of fine parts, dispersed throughout the atomic complex, closely resembling breath with a certain admixture of heat, and similar in some respects to the former and in other respects to the latter. On account of its fineness, that part (*to meros*) is also very different from these [*sc.* the breath and heat] and hence affected more in conjunction with the rest of the atomic complex. All this is revealed by the faculties of the soul: feelings, the mobilities of the mind, thoughts and all those things the loss of which causes death. Moreover, one must bear in mind that the soul has the greatest share in causing sensation; but it would not have this [causal] function in itself, if it were not in some way enveloped by the rest of the atomic complex.

> (LS 14A; my translation)

The first information provided by Epicurus is that the soul is a body (*psuchê sôma estin*), an atomic aggregate destined like most other aggregates for eventual disintegration. However, the soul differs from the common run of atomic aggregates by being a subtle body (*sôma leptomerês*)—that is, a body that, because it is made up of exceedingly fine parts, is in some way similar (yet not identical) to breath mixed with heat, and is literally
p. 112 "enveloped" by the body containing it.[37] Since (together with rapidity) ↳ *leptotês* or subtlety is one of the basic features of *eidôla*, perhaps *eidôla* are the atomic aggregates that can be considered closest to the physical composition of the soul. The subtlety of the soul's matter supports its complete diffusion throughout an animal's entire atomic complex (*to athroisma*), and this diffusion is in turn the reason why the soul is the major cause of sense-perception (*tês aisthêseos tên pleistên aitian*), explaining the sensitivity of each animal's parts. Though sensation is indeed the main function that Epicurus attributes to the soul, in characterizing soul as the *major* cause of sensation, Epicurus implies that it is not the only contributing cause. In particular, if the soul were not "enveloped" by the rest of the atomic complex, sensation could not occur. Sense-perception, therefore, is the outcome of cooperation between soul and body.[38]

The perspective on psychology offered by the *Letter to Herodotus* appears to differ significantly from the "parallel" Lucretian treatment in Book 3 of the *De rerum natura*, and the question of the relationship between these two texts has been much debated. Whereas Epicurus seems to preserve a monistic conception of the soul, Lucretius (*DRN* 3.136–44)—probably taking up a terminology already occurring in early Latin literature—distinguishes the *animus* (the rational part) from the *anima* (the nonrational part):[39]

> Now, I affirm that the spirit (*animus*) and the soul (*anima*) are held conjoined with one another and form a single nature (*unam naturam*); but that which is the chief, so to speak, and governs the whole body is reason (*consilium*), which we call spirit and mind (*animum mentemque*). And it is located and fixed at the centre of the chest. Here is where anxiety and fear stir, it is in these regions that we are touched by joys; here, then, lie the mind and the spirit. The rest of the soul, diffused throughout the body, obeys and moves in accordance with the nod and motion of the mind.
>
> (LS 14B part.; trans. Rouse-Smith)

Alongside this passage from Lucretius, it is worth quoting the scholium to §66 of the *Letter to Herodotus* (in my translation):

> In other works [Epicurus] states that [the soul] is composed of smooth, spherical atoms which are very different from those of fire; and that there is a nonrational part (*to men ti alogon*) of it which is diffused throughout the rest of the body, while the rational part (*to de logikon*) is located in the chest, as is evident from fears and joy …[40]

These two texts are noteworthy because of certain similarities between them. Both Lucretius and the scholiast clearly distinguish two parts of the soul.[41]

Lucretius emphasizes that the *animus* and the *anima*, although distinct, together comprise a unified nature, the psychic one, which differs from the aggregate that is the body. The *animus*, or rational part—which Lucretius identifies with "reason" (*consilium*) and further defines as the *mens* (mind)—not only dominates the body, but is also of a higher rank than the *anima* (the nonrational part of the soul), which obeys and moves according to
p. 113 what the *animus*/*mens* establishes. The scholiast and Lucretius agree as to ↳ the location of the two parts: the *animus* is in the breast, in the central region of the chest, and hence in the heart, while the *anima* is disseminated throughout the rest of the body, since it is responsible for sense-perception. The two sources also agree that the *animus* is located in the region of the heart on the grounds that anxiety, fear, and joy come from there. (Judging from the scholium, it seems as though Epicurus himself must have appealed to the phenomena of fear and joy to argue this.) Since the *animus* is the seat of reason, it appears that fear and joy are affections

involving the rational part of the soul, perhaps requiring a kind of rational elaboration that the *anima* is unable to provide. Of course, in Epicurus the distinction between the rational and the nonrational parts of the soul does not involve the sort of contrast (familiar from, e.g., Plato and Aristotle) between rational and appetitive parts, but is rather a distinction between that part of the soul located in the heart (mind) that integrates and elaborates perceptual data and motivates action, and that part of the soul (sensation) that is spread throughout the body and is instrumental to that first part's activity. The nonrational part of the soul is so defined not because it is the seat of appetites or desires that may conflict with reason, but because it is closely linked to sensation (*aisthêsis*), which is itself a nonrational faculty (*alogos*: DL 10.31; cf. Verde 2018).

A passage from Aetius (IV 3, 11, *Doxographi Graeci* 388; Mansfeld and Runia 1422 = Usener 315) provides further evidence for the nature of the soul as Epicurus understands it. Soul is characterized there as a mixture of four elements or, more correctly, of four "qualities" (*krama ek tettarôn*): a fiery quality (*purodous*), an aerial quality (*aerodous*), a pneumatic quality (*pneumatikou*), and a fourth quality that is nameless (*akatonomastou*). This last "ingredient" of the soul is responsible for the perceptive faculty (*to aisthêtikon*), while the pneumatic quality (*pneuma*) is responsible for movement (*kinêsis*), the air (*aera*) for rest (*erêmian*), and the warm element (*thermon*) for the body's perceptible warmth. Aetius therefore adds some important clarifications to our account of Epicurean psychology, suggesting that Epicurus considered the soul to be a union of several elements, each in charge of a specific function. Lucretius's testimony moreover confirms this view, similarly maintaining that the soul is not simple (*simplex*: 3.231) but rather has a triple (*triplex*: 3.237) nature associated with heat, wind, and air. Lucretius claims further that these three elements are not by themselves able to bring about sense-perception—that is, that they cannot by themselves sustain *sensiferi motus* (sense-facilitating motions). For this, one needs the "nameless" fourth nature, a particularly tenuous and mobile element that is responsible for the diffusion of these motions throughout all the limbs (cf. 3.238–51). Lucretius's fourth nature is surely to be identified with the "nameless element" or *akatonomaston*, of which Aetius and Plutarch (*Adv. Col.* 1118D = Usener 314) speak.

There has been much discussion about the features of this fourth element.[42] One interpretive question is whether the fourth nameless nature belongs to the *animus* (the rational part) or to the *anima* (the nonrational part). This question in turn raises the more trenchant question whether the Lucretian distinction between *animus* and *anima* should be understood as a strict partition of the soul (comparable to, e.g., Plato's) along
p. 114 functional lines. If so, then the nameless element would plausibly be located in ↳ the *anima*, since that is the part of soul responsible for sense-perception (and since Lucretius justifies the introduction of the fourth nature as something needed to explain sense-perception). The other three elements of the soul would then be properly assigned to one part or the other. However, there is another plausible answer to the question: that Lucretius does not intend a close correspondence between the soul's constituent elements and its distinct parts, leaving open the possibility that he takes the four elements jointly to constitute the whole of the soul, both *animus* and *anima*.[43] Since Lucretius believes that the *animus* and the *anima* constitute a single nature (cf. *DRN* 3.137), these two "parts" would then be distinct merely on account of their function and location, whereas their constitution, made up of the four differing "ingredients," remains unitary.[44]

5. Nature, Civilization, and the Origin of Language

The origins of human language are for Epicurus an important instance of (and test-case for) his claim that human progress is possible even in the absence of a providentially ordered (or teleologically structured) natural world. Before examining the Epicurean doctrine of language, it will be useful to place this doctrine within the context of the well-known "history of civilization" reported in Lucretius's *De rerum natura*.[45] According to this history, human civilization is not something that has always existed or which begins, as in common Greek and Roman myths, from a mythical golden age of peace and plenty. Civilization is rather achieved through a laborious process, and humanity progresses with difficulty through its own innovations, gradually acquiring techniques—not least the use of language—that facilitate social and communal forms of life.[46] Lucretius is furthermore very clear that the "equipment" that humans put to use to develop and sustain society is not providentially designed for that purpose:

> Such [teleological] explanations, and all other such that humans give, put effect before cause and are based on perverted reasoning; since nothing is born in us simply in order that we may use it, but that which is born creates the use. There was no sight before the eyes with their light were born, no speaking of words before the tongue was made; but rather the tongue's origin came long before speech, and the ear was made long before sound was heard; in a word all the members, as I think, existed before their use; they could not then have grown up for the sake of use.
>
> (*DRN* 4.832–42; trans. Rouse-Smith, modified)

Lucretius's account of human history and development bears out the principle that generation determines use, rather than vice versa. It was only because of fortuitous events that human beings first learned this or that technique, such as the use of fire.[47] Over time, more or less slowly, but always by their own efforts, human
p. 115 beings acquired and ↳ increasingly refined their knowledge and techniques. At the same time, the well-being and comforts they obtained often had deleterious effects (such as ambition, pride, violence, etc.) that resulted in the need to establish justice and ensure punishment where necessary (cf. *DRN* 5.1120–55 and 1426–33). In broad terms, Lucretius invites us to consider the natural world and human reason in dialectic with one another as the "driving forces" of history and civilization.

Turning to the *Letter to Herodotus*, we find Epicurus's explaining language as a product of this dialectical interaction between nature (*phusis*) and reasoning (*logismos*):[48]

> We must take it that even nature was instructed and compelled in many different ways by circumstances (*pragmata*), and that its lessons were later made more accurate, and augmented with new discoveries, by reason—faster among some people, slower among others, and in some ages and eras, owing to [individual needs, by greater leaps], in others by smaller leaps. Thus names too did not originally come into being by coining, but humans' own natures underwent feelings and received impressions which varied peculiarly from tribe to tribe, and each of the individual feelings and impressions caused them to exhale breath peculiarly, according also to the tribal differences from place to place. Later, particular coinings were made by consensus within the individual tribes, so as to make the designations less ambiguous and more concisely expressed. Also, the humans who shared knowledge introduced certain unseen entities, and brought words for them into usage. [Hence some] humans gave utterance under compulsion, and others chose words rationally, and it is thus, as far as the principal cause is concerned, that they achieved self-expressions.
>
> (*Hdt*. 75–6; LS 19A; trans. LS, modified)

In this difficult passage Epicurus sets "nature" and "circumstances" (or "facts") in opposition; by the latter, he appears to mean states of affairs that are themselves higher-order developments out of nature. As a set of

natural processes with no intrinsic teleological purpose or theological import, nature is nonetheless compelled by means of such developments, where these crucially include both human reason (*logismos*) itself and the novelties introduced by its further operations. The example of the origin of language exemplifies this pattern: because meanings are not intrinsic to vocalizations, they vary according to the particular affections of various tribes (*ethnê*) and to the particular representations (*phantasmata*) each has received. These diverse natural languages were later (*husteron*) refined and standardized in a common way (*koinôs)*, with diverse tribes "fixing" names by consensus and imposing uniformity on nature with a view to mutual comprehension.[49] Though rooted in a natural capacity for vocalization, language becomes a mature vehicle for communication only when human reason contributes concepts and meanings to utterances that are not intentional in their own right.[50]

This basic pattern is confirmed by Lucretius. In Book 5 of the *De rerum natura*, Lucretius observes that "time (*aetas*) changes the nature of the whole worlds, and one state of things must pass into another, and nothing remains as it was: all things move (*omnia migrant*), all are changed by nature (*commutat*) and compelled to alter
p. 116 (*vertere ↳ cogit*)" (*DRN* 5.828–31; trans. Rouse-Smith). Lucretius here confirms what is similarly implicit in our *Hdt.* passage: that the Epicurean conception of nature distinguishes among aspects or developments of nature as a whole, with one element of nature acting upon another. Thus, time—which intrinsically belongs to nature —modifies all things, and nature itself forces all things to change.[51] Lucretius similarly describes the development of language as follows (5.1028–31): it was nature that forced (*subegit*) humans to emit (*mittere*) various sounds of language (*varios linguae sonitus*), while it was utility (*utilitas*) that shaped (*expressit*) the names of things (*nomina rerum*). Here the basic dialectical relationship seems to be not between nature (*phusis*) and reason (*logismos*) per se, but between nature (*natura*) and utility (*utilitas*). While nature is responsible for the emission of simple sounds (obviously not articulated and, therefore, not strictly linguistic), it is utility that provides the most stringent motivation for intentional speech.

Both Epicurus and Lucretius, then, posit a two-stage process in the original development of human language, the first occurring under natural compulsion, and the second reflecting the compulsion of nature by reason as language is honed by humans toward useful ends. Epicurus was likely aware of the "classical" debate about whether language is generated by nature or by convention.[52] He in fact adopts a kind of hybrid position.[53] Though the starting point of significant speech is nature itself, the activity of reason (*logismos*) is a subsequent but crucial development out of nature, one that further refines it. In the end, the Epicurean conception of language is neither fully naturalistic nor conventionalist, but makes the two perspectives converge in an ingenious "evolutionary" way. The Epicurean account of language is intended to show that civilization and its arts develop through the interaction of nature and reason, in a world devoid of natural purpose and providential design.[54]

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Notes

1. Hammerstaedt-Smith 2014: 56–8. On this fragment, cf. Erler 2017: 52–9 and Verde 2017b: 79–85. See also Chiaradonna 2015 and Verde 2021.

2. On the principles of atomism, see Algra, this volume. On the meaning of "nature" in the Epicurean criticism of providence, cf. Fowler 2002: 242–4.

3. Cf. Noller 2019.

4. Cf. Isnardi Parente 1977 and Sedley 2007: 155–66.

5. Cf. Lucretius *DRN* 2.532–40.

6. On Epicurus's *Letter to Pythocles*, see Verde 2022a.

7. Cf. the parallel testimony of Lucretius *DRN* 2.1070–6. These arguments derive from the earlier atomist tradition (cf. Simplicius *In Aristot. De caelo* 202.16 = DK 67 A 21 and Diogenes Laertius *VP* 9.44 = DK 68 A 1 = LM VII 27 D13).

8. Cf. Essler 2011: 246–52. In the *Timaeus,* Plato represents the world as the artefact of a divine craftsman. Aristotle believed that a divine mover governs the heavens. On Epicurus' criticism of Plato's *Timaeus* see Verde 2023; on Epicurus's approach to Aristotle see Verde 2016b.

9. Cf. Fowler 2002: 260; cf. also Isnardi Parente 1966: 391–407.

10. In my view the "swerve" (*clinamen*) is not a violent movement that breaks the order of nature, but is inherent in atoms and matter generally. It is a "new" motion only in the sense that it does not depend on previous causes or movements and is capable of initiating a new state of affairs. On the swerve and the question of human freedom, see Warren, this volume.

11. On the gods, see §3.

12. In Book 5, Lucretius devotes well-known verses to the natural "aging" of the whole (243ff.) and to the fact that everything is incessantly conquered by time—from stones to the gods' temples, from the sun to the moon and stars.

13. In the *Letter to Pythocles* (§90, §92–§93), Epicurus does not completely reject the doctrine of the vortex (*dinê*), but he does not identify *dinê* with the domain of necessity (see Verde 2022a: 159–60, and 176–80).

14. Cf. Perilli 1996: 126–7. See also Warren 2004.

15. It is not possible to go into the details of this complex doctrine here, but it is worth noting that, unlike Democritus, Epicurus offers some justification for the fact that atoms have an ungraspable but nonetheless limited number of shapes, sizes, and weights. Specifically, Epicurus holds that there are absolutely minimal material magnitudes (*ta elachista*) within each atom and that, due to their own limited number and arrangement, these magnitudes determine a fixed number of atomic properties. *Elachista* are both incapable of forming an aggregate (indeed, the atom cannot be considered an aggregate of minimal magnitudes) and inseparable from the atom itself. Such minimal magnitudes also explain the indivisibility of atoms, according to Epicurus. Cf. Verde 2013a; see also Algra, this volume.

16. Significantly, according to the late testimony of "Hippolytus," Democritus acknowledged the existence of worlds devoid of living beings, plants, and moistness ("Hippolytus" *Ref*. 1.13.3 = DK 68 A 40; cf. also Epicurus *Hrdt*. 74).

17. Cf. Runia 2018.

18. Marx 1975: 39, "In der Theorie der Meteore erscheint also die Seele der epikureischen Naturphilosophie" ("In the theory of celestial phenomena appears the soul of Epicurean philosophy of nature"; my translation). To quote the title of a recent book by W. Kullmann (2014), Epicurus, like Aristotle, is a *Naturwissenschaftler* (natural scientist), but the former ↳ considers science in a very different way from the latter (cf., e.g., Aristotle *EE* I 1216b, 10–16). For Epicurus, science is *always* oriented toward ethics. Cf. Spinelli 2012.

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19. On this point, cf. Verde 2013b, Bakker 2016: 8–75, Masi 2014, Leone 2017, Masi 2022, and Tsouna 2023.

20. As Masi (2022) has recently emphasized, the fact that celestial phenomena may be generated by multiple causes is the direct consequence of the potentialities of infinite matter.

21. My interpretation of the method of multiple explanations is quite different from those of other scholars, who see it as reflecting limitations of the scientific capabilities of humans (e.g., LS, vol. 1, 95–6, and Hankinson 2013). By contrast, I take the *pleonachos tropos* to be a scientific method and stress the dependence of explanations supplied through the method on the actual causes which generate celestial phenomena. Epicurus's *pleonachos tropos* plays an important role not only in the Hellenistic epistemological debate (it is likely that Posidonius criticized this method [cf. Verde 2016a]), but also in relation to the science of that time. Epicurus evidently did not share the explanations of celestial phenomena provided by scientists of his time because he did not share their scientific method: this explains his use of a new method of investigation of celestial phenomena and, as we read in Book 11 of *On Nature* (26.38 Arrighetti), his rejection of astronomical instruments (*organa*) used by scientists for their research on nature.

22. Cf. Verde 2022b: chapter 1.

23. On the modern reputation of Epicureans as atheists, see Duncan and LoLordo, this volume.

24. For a forceful defense of such a view, see Sedley 2011; for plausible objections, see Kany-Turpin 2007: 162. A different (and, in my view, more convincing) position is adopted by Konstan 2011. Cf. also Santoro 2000: 60–5 and Essler 2011: 344–53. Interesting details on this crucial point are in Philodemus' theological work preserved by *PHerc*. 89/1301/1383 (ed. D'Angelo 2022).

25. Taylor, this volume. See also Fine 2014: 228–54 and Tsouna 2016.

26. See Robitzsch 2021.

27. As already noted, our sources agree in claiming that the gods are known by the mind, or, more specifically, are "theorized by reason" (*logôi theôrêtoi*). Cf. again the scholium to *Ratae Sententiae* 1 and Aëtius I 7.34, *Doxographi Graeci* 306; Mansfeld and Runia 376 = Usener 355; cf. also Cicero *ND* 1.18.49 and 37.105. (Note also the occurrences of the expression in [Demetrius Lacon] [*De forma dei*] coll. 23.11 and 24.1–2 Santoro and in Philodemus *De diis* 3 fr. 11.2 Diels; this Epicurean expression is used by the physicians Erasistratus and Asclepiades of Bithynia [see respectively Vegetti 2018 and Leith 2012 (and 2023); see also Grimaudo 2018].) The meaning of this expression has been much debated by interpreters. In Epicurus's usage, "theorize" (*theôrein*) does not designate cognition of specifically intelligible objects, but rather refers to the activity of observing/seeing. The addition of "reason" (*logôi*) specifies the mode of theorizing involved: the gods are observable thanks to reason. But this does not mean that they are not real living beings endowed with a physical body made up of atoms. Evidently, the fact that the gods cannot be perceived by the senses explains why the gods are *logôi theôrêtoi*; the atomic *simulacra* flowing from the divine bodies make a very long journey (since the blessed seats of the gods are the *intermundia* or *metakosmia*, the wide spaces between one *kosmos* and the next. Cf. *Pyth*. 89, "Hippolytus" *Ref*. 1.22.3 = Usener 359, and Cicero *Div*. 2.17.40 = Usener p. 234; see the detailed study by Rescigno 1996: 57–96). These
p. 120 simulacra arrive in such a subtle and attenuated form that ↳ they cannot be perceived by the senses, but only by the mind or *dianoia* (cf. Augustinus *Ad Diosc. epist.* 98.27 = Usener 352).

28. The title of Demetrius's work is unknown (cf. Del Mastro 2014: 217).

29. Cf. Piergiacomi 2017: 141–51.

30. For a recent deep overview of the Epicurean theology, cf. Piergiacomi 2017. See also Spinelli-Verde 2020.

31. Cf. Koch 2005: 51–75.

32. This topic is controversial and widely debated. For a detailed overview of this debate and for further essential bibliographical references, see Piergiacomi 2017: chapter 5.

33. For this expression see too Homer *Il*. XXIV 258 and Aristotle *Pol.* III 13, 1284a 10–11.

34. Probably Epicurus intended to make a rejoinder to the very different *homoiôsis theôi* of Plato's *Theaetetus* (176a–b)—cf. Erler 2002 and Reydams-Schils 2017. On Epicurus and Plato's *Theaetetus* see Verde 2020b. On the importance of the gods to Epicurean ethics, see Mitsis, this volume.

35. Cf. Drozdek 2005: 165–6.

36. On the Epicurean psychology, cf. Diano 1974: 129–280, Kerferd 1971, Konstan 2008, and Masi-Verde 2018.

37. Cf. Aristotle *De caelo* III 5, 303b 19–21, where fire is said to be the subtlest (*leptotaton*) of all bodies.

38. The capillary diffusion of the soul throughout the body is able to make every part of it actually sensitive. In the *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus does not explain in detail the way in which the body and the soul interact to produce sensation. However, one can surmise that, on the one hand, if the soul did not "activate" the body, it would not actually be receptive to the *simulacra* which continuously detach from solid external objects; while on the other hand, if there were no body with its pores through which *simulacra* pass, the soul could not receive them and thereafter process them in rational terms.

39. Cf. Verde 2017a.

40. According to LS, vol. 2: 74 the smooth or spherical atoms "could be either all those of the soul … or those of the nameless element." The former view seems particularly compelling to me.

41. Some interpreters believe that this distinction is already present in the *Letter to Herodotus* (that is, in the original text written by Epicurus, without the scholium). In my view, this is a questionable claim. At least two phases of Epicurus's psychology can be identified: the first one, as witnessed by the *Letter to Herodotus*, entails a strong psychological monism devoid of any distinction between function and location; in this context, the soul has above all the function of guaranteeing the possibility of sense-perception. The second phase, attested by the scholium, by Lucretius, by Diogenes of Oenoanda (fr. 37.I.5–7 Smith), and by Demetrius Lacon (*PHerc*. 1012, col. 42.6–9 Puglia), involves a "bipartition" of the soul into rational and nonrational parts. However, how are we to understand this "bipartition"? Significant proof of its absence in the *Letter to Herodotus* is precisely the scholium to §66, in which the scholiast maintains that Epicurus recognized such a bipartition in *other* works: the scholiast presumably would not have provided this information, had he himself found this "bipartition" already present in the text of the letter. Cf. Verde 2020a.

42. One cannot rule out the possibility that Epicurus borrowed the term *akatonomaston* from one of the "published" but lost works by Aristotle, be it the *Peri philosophias* or the *Eudemus* (cf. Cicero *Tusc*. 1.10.22; 17.41 = fr. 27 Ross = Gigon 994); see Scalas 2019.

43. Cf. Isnardi Parente 1983[2]: 38–9.

p. 121 44. Cf. Repici 2008: 393.

45. See further Asmis, this volume.

46. The secondary literature on an importantly related topic, the Epicurean account of the origin of law, is vast, but see especially Sasso 1979 and Campbell 2003. This account may have originated in the *Against Empedocles* of the Epicurean Hermarchus of Mytilene (Porphyry *De abst.* I 7-12 = 34 Longo Auricchio).

47. Thus, it was lightning or the friction caused by one tree violently falling on another that brought fire to mortals, just as the sun taught them to cook food because they observed that the heat coming from the sun's rays ripened fruits in the fields (cf. *DRN* 5.1091–104).

48. Cf. Morel 2009: 7–15.

49. A different opinion is held by Reinhardt 2008: 128; contra cf. the compelling remarks by Giannantoni 1994: 253–4. Cf. also Atherton 2005: 121–2.

50. The question whether the central lines of *Ep. Hdt* 76 constitute a third theoretical moment or whether it is part of the second (and final) stage of the genesis of language is much debated. In any case, Epicurus here introduces "experts" (*tous suneidotas*) who further refine the language.

51. In expressing this point, Lucretius uses a verb that conveys compulsion (*cogere*), reminiscent of the verb *anagkasthênai* used in the *Letter to Herodotus* (75).

52. See, e.g., Plato's *Cratylus* and Aristotle's *De interpretatione* (16a).

53. Cf. Demetrius Lacon, *PHerc*. 1012, col. 67.7–9 Puglia.

54. My deep gratitude goes to Nathan Powers and Jacob Klein for their helpful remarks on an early version of this chapter. This work was written as part of the scientific activities of the PRIN 2022 Project "*Kanon:* Epicurus' Epistemology and Its Roots" (2022W33NXT / B53D23023200006).

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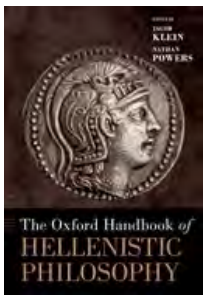
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CHAPTER

5 Canonic: The Epicurean Theory of Knowledge

Christopher Taylor

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Abstract

This chapter examines the part of philosophy that the Epicureans called *kanonikê*, a term meaning "theory of standards or criteria," the aim of which is to establish the standards of the truth of beliefs, and thereby the truth of Epicurean theory. The fundamental standard is provided by appearances (equivalently, experiences, sense-impressions, or sense-contents), feelings, and concepts. Epicurus argues that all appearances are true, first by arguments external to Epicurean theory (viz. that no alternative to that thesis is possible) and then by an argument internal to Epicureanism, that appearances exactly reproduce their physical causes (viz. *eidôla*, films of atoms emitted in continuous streams by external physical objects and exactly reproducing the surface characteristics of the objects which emit them). This chapter contends that both sets of arguments are inconclusive, and that since the role of concepts as standards of truth depends on their derivation from appearances, Epicurus's attempt to guarantee the truth of his theory is consequently unsuccessful.

Keywords: standard, criterion, appearance, experience, sense-impression, feeling, concept, atom, truth, eidôla

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1. General Introduction: *Kanonikê* and Criteria

Epicurean natural philosophy involves a bold attempt to marry metaphysical realism with an epistemology of extreme empiricism. According to the former, the nature of things is independent of the mind, and it is the task of the intellect to achieve a systematic and detailed grasp of that independent realm. According to the latter, all knowledge is ultimately derived from experiences, primarily sense-experiences (*aisthêseis*) and secondarily affective feelings (*pathê*). Epicurus's substantive account of independent reality is taken over in most essentials from the atomism of Leucippus and Democritus (fifth and fourth centuries BC), which immediately presents the difficulty that, on Epicurus's interpretation of that theory, sense-experience can reveal nothing but how external things appear to us, leaving their intrinsic nature necessarily inaccessible. In order to escape from what he takes to be the skeptical impasse in which the earlier atomists are trapped, Epicurus requires a guarantee that experience mirrors reality with perfect faithfulness and claims that this guarantee is provided by the basic principle that all appearances are true. That principle is the central thesis of that part of philosophy which he terms *kanonikê*—i.e., theory of standards or measures—from the term *kanôn*, basically a straight-edge or measuring stick, hence by extension a yardstick or standard. In the latter sense, the term is more or less interchangeable with *metron*, measure (as in Protagoras's celebrated slogan, "Man is the measure of all things" [*pantôn chrêmatôn metron estin anthrôpos*]), and with *kritêrion*, criterion (standard or distinguishing mark).

That knowledge or theory (equivalently designated as *to kanonikon*) was one of the three principal parts of the
p. 126 Epicurean philosophy, along with natural philosophy and ↳ ethics (Diogenes Laertius X.30). It had, however, a special place in this taxonomy, being in some sense fundamental or foundational. In the same passage of Diogenes's *Life of Epicurus* we read that it contains *ephodous epi tên pragmateian*, which might mean "approaches to the subject" (or "to the [Epicurean] system"), or possibly "methods to be used in the subject"; the former interpretation suggests that *kanonikê* provides an introduction to Epicurean theory as a whole, whereas the latter suggests a different picture, viz. that it identifies methods, arguments or perhaps principles internal to the theory, and is thereby foundational rather than introductory. The foundational view seems to be supported by a later sentence from the same passage, which says that the Epicureans put *kanonikê* together with natural philosophy and describe it as "concerned with (a/the) criterion and (a/the) principle, and as elemental" (*kalousi d' auto peri kritêriou kai archês, kai stoicheiôtikon*). But while that sentence suggests some sort of foundationalist function for *kanonikê*, its terminology raises additional questions, in particular the question what the criterion is a criterion of.

The following sections of Diogenes's *Life* (X.31–2) provide some measure of clarification. The passage begins with the statement that the Epicureans reject dialectic as misleading, "for it is sufficient that students of nature be guided by the sounds (possibly 'words,' or perhaps 'names') of things" (*arkein gar tous phusikous chôrein kata tous tôn pragmatôn phthongous*). Our best clue to the meaning of this gnomic pronouncement is given by Epicurus's own programmatic statement at the beginning of the *Letter to Herodotus* (DL X.37–8). The first thing to note, he says, is that we must grasp "the things underlying sounds" (*ta hupotetagmena tois phthongois*), "so that we can decide on what we are thinking of or investigating or disputing about by reference to them." The things underlying sounds are apparently thoughts or conceptions of things, which amount to the meanings of words: "it is necessary that the primary conception in respect of each sound should be investigated (*anangkê gar to prôton ennoêma kath hekaston phthongon blepesthai*) and not require any demonstration." We are to resolve disputes and inquiries by accessing those conceptions. That process is a more precise description of what the earlier passage calls being guided by the sounds of things. Its crucial feature is that it provides a method of terminating inquiry by confrontation with concepts which are somehow guaranteed as correctly representing the objects of inquiry themselves; in this respect, it is contrasted in the letter with another argumentative process which leaves all disputes unresolved, either by carrying on arguments ad infinitum or leaving us grasping empty sounds. That is dialectic, which Epicurus conceives as the attempt, necessarily fruitless, to reach conclusions about the nature of reality without recourse to sense-perception. It is probable

that what he has chiefly in mind are the complexities of Stoic logic and philosophy of language(, which he regards as burdening the mind with a load of ultimately useless technicality.[1]

Returning to X.31, we see that dialectic, as conceived by Epicurus, is misleading (leads us in the wrong direction) because, while it purports to be a search for truth, and truth about fundamental reality, it leaves no place for one of the criteria of truth about reality, viz. *aisthêseis*, which might be translated "the senses," or "acts
p. 127 of the senses" (i.e., instances of perception). *Aisthêseis* are not the only criteria of truth; further criteria ↳ recognized by Epicurus are general concepts or preconceptions (*prolêpseis*) and feelings (*pathê*); according to Diogenes, the Epicurean school recognized a further criterion, "the imaginative applications of thought" (or "of the intellect" [*tas phantastikas epibolas tês dianoias*]). While all of these claims need further examination, we are at least in a position to answer some of the questions about criteria posed above. The criteria which *kanonikê* is concerned with are criteria of *alêtheia*; it remains to be considered whether that term is better rendered as "truth" or "reality," or as connoting (or possibly confusing) both.

The role of *aisthêseis* as criteria of truth and/or reality combines a somewhat inchoate theory of meaning with a more explicitly developed theory of knowledge. The theory of meaning is stated very briefly in the opening passage of the *Letter to Herodotus* mentioned above (DL X.37–8). Intelligible discourse requires that we should neither utter empty sounds nor seek to define the meaning of every sound by definition in terms of the meaning of another sound, thereby creating an infinite regress of definitions. Both alternatives are avoided if every sound is ultimately anchored to a "primary conception" (*prôton ennoêma*) which requires no definition. *Aisthêseis* are listed first among the sources of these primitive conceptions, followed by "the present applications of thought or any other of the criteria" (*tas parousas epibolas eite dianoas eith' hotou dêpote tôn kritêriôn*), and feelings.

The theory of knowledge seeks to account for our knowledge both of the contents of our minds and of the objective external world. Knowledge of our mental contents itself gives some knowledge of the world. For example, our feelings of pleasure and pain are reliable guides to the desirability or undesirability of possible objects of choice (see §6), but the primary source of our knowledge of things around us is our perceptions. The basic theory is set out succinctly in KD 22–4, supplemented by DL X.31–2. The senses represent things around us as being thus and so, and our experience of these representations prompts the question whether things actually are as they are represented. (The notion of representation is not a particularly technical one, but it is the ordinary notion of how things seem to the various senses—i.e., how they look, sound, feel, taste, or smell.) There are three possibilities; either the senses represent nothing as it is, or they represent everything as it is, or they represent some things as they are and others as they are not. The first possibility is rejected in KD 23 by an argument which looks back to Democritus's "Complaint of the Senses" (Diels-Kranz 68 B 125); the total rejection of the representation of reality by the senses assumes the grasp of an alternative conception of how reality is, such that the senses misrepresent it, but that conception could have had no other sources than the senses themselves (see also Lucretius IV.469–521). The third possibility, which is what we ordinarily take for granted, receives a somewhat more extended rejection, set out in DL X.32. Reason provides no ground for rejecting any sensory representation, since reason is itself grounded on the senses (see previous argument). But neither can any sensory representation justify the rejection of any other. Either they are representations of the same kind (*homogenês*), in which case they are of equal evidential value, or they are not of the same kind, in which case they are representations of different objects, and hence cannot conflict with one another. Two
p. 128 further considerations ↳ are adduced, both obscure. First, one *aisthêsis* cannot give any ground for rejecting another since "we pay attention (*prosechomen*) to both." Second, "the existence of sensory recognitions (*epaisthêmata*) confirms the truth of *aisthêseis*." There remains only the second possibility, that everything is at it seems. The foregoing arguments are supposed to have shown that this thesis, massively counterintuitive though it plainly is, must be true. It is perhaps the principal task of *kanonikê* to show how it can be.

2. Critique of the Foregoing Arguments

Before embarking on that discussion, it is worth giving some brief critical attention to the arguments which we have just set out. The "Democritean" argument is that the thesis that nothing is as it seems is self-refuting, since whoever maintains it must be relying on an alternative conception of what there really is, which conception must have been derived from the senses. It does indeed seem that the claim that sensory representation is totally illusory presupposes a contrast between reality and illusion, such that the person making the claim has an adequate grasp of what reality consists in, but it is less clear that this grasp must have been derived from the senses. For example, Parmenides may be (and has frequently been) interpreted as claiming that our ordinary picture of the perceptual world as consisting of a multiplicity of numerically distinct objects, qualitatively differentiated from one another and subject to universal change, is totally illusory, since what *there is* must be a single undifferentiated, changeless object. The ground for this positive claim is that there is nothing which is not, from which it is taken to follow that claims such as that object X is not object Y, that X is (qualitatively) F but not G, that X may come to be F from previously not having been F, that X may come into being from not being, and cease to be, etc., are all false. The obvious fallaciousness of these arguments is not our concern here; what does concern us is that it is not at all clear that the arguments are ultimately derived from the senses. Their core may be variously expressed, via such formulations as "Whatever is, is," "There is no (such thing as) non-being," or "There are no non-entities." None of those formulations can plausibly be seen as something revealed by the senses. Rather, reflection on what it is to think of something is supposed to make it clear to us that thinking of something which is not is incoherent, contradictory, empty, false (no distinctions being drawn between these, unsurprisingly, since on this interpretation the central target is distinction itself). To use later terminology, the Parmenidean argument for the total rejection of the senses is a priori, not empirical; it is thus a counter-instance to Epicurus's claim that any argument for that conclusion must itself be derived from the senses.

The first argument against the possibility that one sensory representation might justify the rejection of another is a dilemma; either both representations are of the same kind, in which case they have equal
p. 129 evidential status, or they are not of the same kind, ↳ in which case they represent different objects. In either case, Epicurus argues, there are no grounds for favoring the authority of one representation over the other. This raises the question of what it is for representations to be, or not to be, of the same kind. It is likely that representations specific to the different senses are of different kinds to one another; every visual representation is of a different kind from every auditory representation, every tactile representation of a different kind from every representation of smell, etc. But how does the distinction apply to the representations of a single sense? Are such representations of the same kind only if they are qualitatively indistinguishable, or can representations of the same kind differ qualitatively to some degree? If the latter, how much difference is admissible?

If only qualitatively indistinguishable representations count as being of the same kind, the thesis that representations of the same kind have equal evidential status is trivial, for it amounts to the thesis that qualitatively indistinguishable representations have equal status. But if representations other than qualitatively indistinguishable representations count as of the same kind, it is questionable whether all such representations have equal status. Ordinary experience and philosophical literature provide countless examples of apparently conflicting visual experiences, of the oar in water, the square tower that looks round from a distance, the railway lines which seem to converge at the horizon, etc., where we unhesitatingly count one as having greater evidential value than the other.[2] Epicurus seeks to escape this conclusion by construing the conflict not as a conflict between appearances, but as one between appearances and belief (see §4). It is the belief that the railway lines converge at the horizon which is falsified by the appearance of the lines close at hand as parallel, not the appearance of the lines as converging, which is true. But while the lines look as if they converge at the horizon, we typically do not believe that they do (i.e., the appearance of the lines as converging is non-

doxastic). So, there is no belief to be falsified, and Epicurus's escape route is blocked. The thesis that representations of the same kind have equal evidential status is either trivial or false.

If we accept that representations specific to different senses are of different kinds, it does not follow that, as Epicurus maintains, they cannot be representations of the same object. That thesis assumes that there cannot be different kinds of representation of the same thing (whether a substance or a property), but it is not clear why not. We ordinarily and unhesitatingly take it that properties such as size and shape are represented both by vision and by touch, so that, e.g., a sighted person can see that an object is triangular by seeing the three apexes, and a blind person recognize the same object as triangular by feeling the apexes. But according to Epicurean theory (*Herculaneum Papyrus* 19/698 = LS 16C) it is *strictly speaking* false that we can both see and feel shape; strictly speaking, we see color (and nothing but color) and we feel body (and nothing but body). Visually perceived shape is nothing but the boundary of color, and tactually perceived shape is nothing but the boundary of body. Hence, they are not identical with one another, but merely related analogically: "as the shape and size of the colour are to the colour, so the shape and size of the body are to the body: and as the colour is to visual perception, so the body is to perception by touch" (l.c. [3]). But first, why should we concede that strictly
p. 130 we see nothing but color, and feel nothing but body? To have the sense of sight is ↳ (ordinarily) not just to see color, but to discriminate things of various kinds via various visually perceived features including color, size, and shape. Someone who literally sees nothing but color does not have a functioning visual sense; one might conjecture that perhaps infants in the first few days of life, before they begin to discriminate objects, are in some such state. The same is true of the sense of touch; to have a functioning sense of touch is not just to feel body, but to discriminate bodies tactually, which involves the tactile recognition of such properties as shape, size, and relative position.

Further, each sense functions fully only as part of an integrated system, in which the data of the individual senses confirm or, in special cases, correct one another. Suppose that someone regularly identifies an object in plain sight at arm's length as a sphere, but when handling such an object blindfolded identifies it equally regularly as a cube. That person is suffering from a systematic dislocation of the sensory system as a whole. To identify the nature of that dislocation, and hence to determine which of the two senses is defective (or whether both are), requires more than the simple confrontation of the data of sight and of touch. The functioning of each sense, and the causal mechanism underlying that functioning, have to be investigated systematically, in order to determine whether the problematic phenomena connect with other deviant features in the functioning of either sense (e.g.: Does the patient's vision (or sense of touch) exhibit other anomalous features?), or perhaps with a deeper-seated structural defect distorting the entire sensory system. Epicurus takes it for granted that the operation of each sense is, *strictly speaking*, confined to a single subject-matter unique to that sense, and correctly recognizes that on that assumption there can be no such thing as conflict between items of information deriving from different senses. But the initial assumption is false; strictly speaking, a sense is a constituent of a complex informational system, in which different constituents combine to provide information about common objects; such a system is intrinsically liable to generate informational conflict (the more liable the more complex it is).

On Long and Sedley's charitable reading of Epicurus (LS i, 84), the latter maintains that shape is discerned by both sight and touch only secondarily, since as visually perceived, shape is only the boundary of the primary object of vision, viz. color, and as tactually perceived, only the boundary of the primary object of touch, viz. body. The primary-secondary distinction is itself not beyond question. Even if we grant that visually perceived shape is always the boundary of an expanse of color, why should we not say that color is what is perceived as filling the space within a boundary? More crucially, even if we accept that shape is perceived only secondarily by both sight and touch, while those senses have different primary objects, color and body respectively, it is none the less true that the perception of shape is essential to both senses. Epicurus's thesis of the incommensurability of the senses requires that strictly, only the primary object of a given sense is perceived by

that sense, but if, as is the case regarding shape, the perception of a secondary object is equally essential to the functioning of that sense, his thesis is refuted.

As noted above, Epicurus adds two further considerations in support of his claim that the data of the senses
p. 131 cannot conflict with one another: (1) we pay attention ↳ (*prosechomen*) to all of them; (2) "the fact of sensory recognitions confirms the truth of the *aisthêseis*" (*to ta epaisthêmata d' huphestanai pistoutai tên tôn aisthêseôn alêtheian*). Regarding (1), if "pay attention to" means simply "notice" or "are aware of," it is hard to see how the thesis that there is no sensory information of which we are unaware (itself questionable, in the light of subliminal perception and similar phenomena) is supposed to show that all such information is of equal evidential value. Long and Sedley translate "they all command our attention" (LS 16B[7]), which suggests that the thought may be that all are equally "out there"—i.e., objective. That may be right, but it requires the ascription of a further layer of meaning to the verb, which literally connotes our attitude to our sensory data, not, as on Long and Sedley's translation, the effect which those data have on us. The point in (2) may be in effect the same; if we recognize our sensory data as being of certain types, they must actually be of those types. But that is merely the question-begging move from "if x seems to be F, x really seems to be F" to "if x seems to be F, x really is F."

3. "All Appearances Are True"

So far, we have considered Epicurus's attempt to show that we have no alternative to acknowledging that everything is as it is represented by the senses. An alternative formulation of that thesis (more strictly a number of possibly non-equivalent formulations) is that all sensory perceptions, impressions, or appearances are true. Thus, Sextus reports that (for Epicurus) all *aisthêta* (sense-contents or sense-objects) are true and real (*alêthê kai onta*) (*M* VIII.9 and 63), that all *aisthêta* are reliable (*M* VIII.355), that every *phantasia* (appearance, image) is true (*M* VII.203–4 and 210), that every *phantasia* comes from something which exists (*apo huparchontos einai*, *M* VIII.63), and that *aisthêsis* (sense, the senses, or perception) always tells the truth (*alêtheuein*, *M* VIII.9) and never says what is false (*mêdepote pseudomenês*, VIII.185). Plutarch says that according to the Epicureans every *phantasia* occurring by means of *aisthêsis* is true (*Col.* 1109a–b), and other writers attest that every *aisthêsis* and every *phantasia* is true (Usener note 248 [Aetius], 349.5–6 [Aristocles]).[3] This formulation has given rise to the objection that truth is a property of items with propositional content, represented abstractly by sentences, and instantiated psychologically in thoughts and beliefs, whereas the Epicurean picture represents it as a property belonging indifferently to sensory states, such as my hearing a particular sound, and to the contents of such states—e.g., the sound which I hear.

One possible solution to this problem is what we might call a modest or minimalist reading of Epicurus, which takes *alêthês* in the formulas considered above as "real" rather than "true" and thus understands Sextus's *alêthê kai onta* as "true, i.e. real, something that there is." The most modest version is simply that sense-experiences really occur; e.g., the oar's looking bent to me now is an event which forms part of my mental history. But the
p. 132 simple claim that sense-experiences really occur says nothing whatever ↳ about their epistemological status, and hence offers no support to Epicurus's theory of nature. The same is true of a slightly more ambitious version of his thesis, which offers an account of experiences as involving a distinction between act and object; not merely are experiences real events, but they are acts of the senses, and have real objects; e.g., if I have a tune running through my head, there is something, namely the tune, which is running through my head. But failing any substantive account of the object of sense-experience, the purely logical distinction between act and object can contribute nothing to Epicurus's overall project of guaranteeing that his theory tells the truth of how things really are.

Epicurus provides such an account via his theory of the causation of sense-experiences. The things which stimulate *aisthêseis* are real physical objects of a special kind, namely *eidôla*, (literally "images"). *Eidôla* are films

of atoms emitted in continuous streams by solid physical objects, and exactly reproducing the surface features of those objects (*Letter to Herodotus*, DL X.46–53). For example, when I look at someone face-to-face, my visual impression of their face is caused by a stream of such films (each apparently one atom thick), each of which at the start of its journey exactly reproduces the contours of the face as if it were a mask. On their way from the other person's face to my eyes, the films may be distorted by collision with other atoms in the intervening space, so that on arrival they no longer exactly reproduce their source; so, if I am looking at the person through a fog, the atomic films which were sharp and distinct at the outset may be blurred and indistinct on arrival. But, crucially, my visual impression of the face as blurred and indistinct exactly reproduces the state of the films which impact my eyes. The stream of *eidôla* is experienced as a single continuing object, and the properties of that object as it is represented include properties which exactly reproduce the properties of the *eidôla* which impact the sense-organs; e.g., the large square tower in the distance looks small and round because the *eidôla* which it emits actually are small and round when they reach the eye. It is that exact fit between properties represented in experiences and the properties of the *eidôla* causing those experiences which Epicurus picks out by describing *aisthêseis* and *aisthêta* as *alêthê*. There is no doubt that when Sextus says that according to Epicurus *aisthêsis* always *alêtheuei* and never *pseudetai* he is saying that the senses always tell the truth and never say what is false, and we have no reason to doubt that he is correctly presenting Epicurus's own thought. It might be objected that, strictly, all that Epicurus should be taken to claim is that the senses are always accurate, not that they are always true, since truth is a property of items with propositional content, and it is controversial whether sense-perception is such an item (as noted above). But perception, like other non-linguistic forms of representation, such as pictorial depiction, certainly has representational content, in that the senses represent things as being such and such, and that content, whether or not it is itself counted as a kind of propositional content, or as merely approximating to it, is sufficient to qualify sensory representation as assessable as a bearer of truth or falsity. Moreover, it is the truth of sensory representation, thus understood, which Epicurus sees as the ultimate guarantee of the truth of his theory as a whole.[4]

In fact, that property of exact matching appears to be peculiar to visual perception, and, further, confined to a restricted range of properties perceived by sight. To take hearing as typical of non-visual perception, sounds are produced when streams of atoms of air cause vibrations within the ears, but there is no matching of the properties of those streams of atoms with the sound which is registered. The sound of the trumpet is shrill and piercing, but neither the streams of atoms, nor their motion, nor the aural vibrations which they cause are shrill and piercing. Indeed, none of these has any auditory properties. Those properties emerge from the action of the streams of air atoms on the structure of the auditory system; hence, there can be no fit or lack of fit between the properties of the sound itself and the properties of the causes of the sound. The latter are, of course, apt for the causation of the former. But that is an entirely different relation from exactly matching, as it were mirroring, those properties. The same considerations apply to the other non-visual senses, discussion of which is omitted here for the sake of brevity.

Returning to vision, the thesis of exact matching of the impression to its immediate cause applies only to a selection of visual impressions, primarily impressions of size and shape. The distant tower looks small and round, which is to say that the observer has a visual impression (*aisthêton*) of the tower as something small and round, and the content of that impression exactly matches the actual properties of the objects which cause that impression, viz. the individual components of the stream of *eidôla* which impacts the eye. The match is between the content of the impression and the actual properties of the individual *eidôla*, not between the content of the impression and the properties of the stream itself, which, considered as a three-dimensional object occupying the space between the tower and the observer, is neither small nor round. But as well as looking small and round, the tower looks to be a single stationary object continuous over time; that is the visual impression which it gives. The individual *eidôla*, on the other hand, are not stationary, nor is the stream itself. The immediate cause of the impression is a continuous stream of numerically distinct objects moving at immense speed, whereas the impression is of a single continuous stationary object. In respect, therefore, of the

properties of stability of position and of continuity over time, the impression does not match or mirror the properties which cause it, as Epicurus's theory requires.

The claim that sense-impressions are always true appears, then, to fit only a comparatively narrow range of cases, though the citations above make it fairly clear that Epicurus took it to apply to all sense-impressions. Epicurus's confidence in the universal application of his thesis may derive from his doctrine that sensory states are *alogoi*—i.e., that they are not influenced by reason or intellect, but simply reproduce their external causes mechanically or as it were photographically. This is attested in DL X.31: "For every *aisthêsis*, he says, is *alogos* and receptive of no memory; for it is not stimulated by itself, nor, being stimulated by something else, can it add or take away anything," and by Sextus in *M* VIII.9: "And *aisthêsis*, which is receptive of the things presented to it, neither taking away nor adding anything, since it is *alogos*, always tells the truth and receives what there is just as it is in reality. But while all the *aisthêta* are true, the things we believe differ, and some are true and
p. 134 some false." The idea, then, is that once the intellect has been totally ↳ stripped out from the process of perception, there is nothing for the senses to do other than mirror their causes passively, and that the passivity of that process guarantees its total accuracy. But it appears straightforwardly false that sensory representation —i.e., its seeming, via some specific sense or senses, that something is such and such—is not affected in any way by the intellect. For, plainly, something's *seeming* to be such and such is no more independent of memory and other intellectual functions than is the thought or the belief that it *is* such and such. If it sounds to me as if someone is playing the oboe next door, I rely on memory of what an oboe sounds like to classify the sound as that of an oboe. Similarly, its looking to me as if that is Socrates over there (irrespective of whether or not I believe that it is) depends on my memory of Socrates's appearance.[5]

Second, the passive or photographic model of perception, even where it applies, does not guarantee that perception represents things exactly as they are. A photograph of the railway lines running into the distance shows them as converging, exactly as the naked eye does. Hence the photograph no more represents the lines as they are, viz. parallel, than vision itself does. It will not do to suggest that the photograph exactly represents its own particular object, the lines at a distance, which is distinct from the lines nearby (see LS i, 85), since there is only one pair of lines, which, when seen or photographed from nearby seem (i.e., look) to be as they are, viz. parallel, but when seen or photographed from a distance seem (i.e., look) to be as they are not, viz. converging. Since mirrors reverse left and right, my mirror image, showing my hair parted on the right, does not represent me exactly as I am, with my hair parted on the left. It will not help Epicurus to weaken his theory still further, making it the theory that perception represents things more or less exactly, because that will merely revive the argument in §2 as an argument against the possibility of distinguishing more from less exact perceptions.

Perhaps the most startling feature of Epicurus's account of *aisthêsis* is his counting dreams and hallucinations as kinds of *aisthêta*, and therefore as true. The most explicit statement of this thesis is Sextus *M* VIII.63–4 = LS 16F: "Epicurus said that all the *aisthêta* are true, and that every *phantasia* arises from something that there is, and is just as the thing which stimulates the *aisthêsis*." This sentence gives us both aspects of Epicurus's general theory of the truth of *aisthêseis*, which is then applied to what would ordinarily be considered a case of false *aisthêsis*, viz. Orestes's hallucination of the Furies: "So in the case of Orestes … his *aisthêsis* which was stimulated by *eidôla* was true, for the *eidôla* were there, but his mind believed falsely when it thought that the Furies are solid objects" (Sextus ibid.)[6] Falsehood, according to Epicurus, is a characteristic of belief, not of appearance. But, like other kinds of representation, hallucinations can be non-doxastic; when I put on a virtual-reality headset, it can seem to me exactly as if I am being chased by a gang of Furies, though I know perfectly well that there are no Furies in pursuit of me. I may understand the causal mechanism by which the illusion is produced, and thereby grasp that the illusion exactly corresponds to the design specification which has been programmed into the machine. So, there is an exact correspondence between the content of the illusion and something external to my mind, as in Epicurean theory there is an exact correspondence between the *aisthêta* and the *êidôla* which cause them. But that does not eliminate the difference between the situation
p. 135 (1) ↳ where it seems as if I am being chased by Furies and I am in fact being chased by Furies, and the situation

(2) in which it seems (non-doxastically) as if I am being chased by Furies and I am not in fact being chased by Furies. In case (1), things are as they seem—i.e., the appearance is true; in case (2), things are not as they seem —i.e., the appearance (not my belief) is false. This example is a further instance of the phenomenon of non-doxastic appearance mentioned in §2, in the cases of the railway lines which appear to meet at the horizon, etc.

4. The Relative Priority of Appearances and of Epicurean Theory

Epicurus insists that, while all appearances are true (i.e., exact reproductions of the *eidôla* which produce them), they are liable to mislead us, if, instead of subjecting them to the critical scrutiny which the atomic theory requires, we uncritically assume that things are exactly as they appear— e.g., that the distant tower which looks small and round actually is small and round. Instead of immediately assuming that the tower is just as it looks, thereby acquiring a false belief, we must wait to see whether the belief that the distant tower is small and round is confirmed or contradicted by the appearance of the tower close at hand. That appearance—i.e., the tower's looking large and square—contradicts the belief that the tower is small and round, and hence, since the appearance of the tower close at hand is true, the belief that the tower is small and round is false. But the appearance of the tower in the distance as small and round is also true, according to Epicurus. So why is the belief that it is small and round not confirmed by that appearance? Appearances, in Epicurus's view, cannot contradict one another, since they are all true. So, from the multiplicity of appearances of a given object, how do we tell which appearance of that object contradicts the belief that the object is F (and thereby shows that this belief is false), and which confirms it?

The epistemic authority of the appearance of the tower close at hand is guaranteed, not by that appearance itself, nor by any other appearance or appearances, but by the atomic theory's explanation of how the different appearances are generated—i.e., the theory of *eidôla* set out briefly in §3. When the tower is seen from a distance, the *eidôla* which started their journey large and square are small and round when they reach their destination, the eye of the observer, where they generate appearances exactly reproducing their reduced size and altered shape. When, on the other hand, the tower is seen from nearby, the smaller intervening space provides many fewer opportunities for the distortion of the *eidôla* by the impact of other atoms moving in that space (Lucretius IV.353–63 = LS 16G). In both cases, the *eidôla* impacting the sensory apparatus are exactly reproduced in the appearance (i.e., both appearances are true), but it is only in the case of seeing the tower nearby that the *eidôla* reach the eye virtually unchanged from their original size, shape, etc.—properties which, in turn, exactly match the corresponding ↳ properties of the object emitting the *eidôla*. Hence, it is that appearance which has the epistemic authority to confirm the belief that the tower is large and square, and to contradict the belief that it is small and round.

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This should imply that appearances are the primary criteria of the truth of Epicurean theory. But, in fact, the theory of *eidôla* shows that the direction of validation is the reverse of that. Appearance A_1 is counted as having the epistemic authority to falsify a belief, and appearance A_2 as lacking that authority, on the strength of the truth of the theory that A_1 (e.g., the appearance of the tower near at hand) is an appearance of the thing *as it is* (viz. large and square), whereas A_2 (e.g., the appearance of the tower at a distance) is not an appearance of the thing as it is, but is an appearance of the thing as it is not (viz. small and round). It is, then, not the truth of the appearance which is the criterion of the truth of the theory, but the converse. Of course, Epicurus does not use the vocabulary of the truth and falsity of appearances, since he is committed to the assertion that all appearances are true. But while he cannot allow that appearances differ in respect of truth and falsity, he not merely allows, but insists that they differ in respect of possession and lack of epistemic authority. To insist on that difference is in effect to reinstate the truth and falsity of appearances, since difference of epistemic authority requires the distinction between an appearance of the thing as it is (i.e., a true appearance) and an appearance of the thing as it is not (i.e., a false appearance).

But might not the direction of validation be reciprocal? I.e., might it not be the case both that the theory provides the criterion for the epistemic authority of appearances, as described above, and that the appearances are the primary criterion for the truth of the theory? That is pretty much what Epicurus thinks, but, in fact, the role of appearances in guaranteeing the truth of the theory is ancillary at best. Crucially, according to the theory itself, the central elements of the theory—atoms, void, and *eidôla*—are all unobservable; there can be literally no appearances of any of these items themselves. Appearances are generated by a continuous bombardment of the various sensory systems by streams of *eidôla*. Hence, there can be no such thing as the appearance of a single atom, or of the void, or of a single *eidôlon*, since none of these can emit a stream of *eidôla*. All appearances are therefore appearances of the aggregates of atoms which emit those streams. These appearances are not the ultimate guarantee of the truth of the belief that the primary constituents of reality are atoms, physically indivisible solids containing theoretically indivisible parts, moving incessantly in an infinite void. The primary grounds of that belief are theoretical arguments, such as the following: 1) if there is no lower limit to theoretical division, every atom would be composed of infinitely many parts, each of finite size, and would therefore be infinitely large (*Letter to Herodotus*, DL X.57); 2) it is impossible even to conceive of an infinity of physical parts of an atom, since that would require the theoretically impossible task of "traversing" an infinity of items in thought (*Letter to Herodotus*, DL X.56); 3) there must be a void, since the atoms are in perpetual motion, and motion is impossible except in a void (*Letter to Herodotus*, DL X.40).

This is not to deny that appearances play some role in supporting such beliefs. For instance, both Epicurus
 (*Letter to Herodotus*, DL X.56–9 = LS 9A[9]) and Lucretius ↳ (I.599–608 = LS 9C[1]) support the theory of minimal parts of atoms by appeal to the analogy of a smallest perceptible item. There is, for instance, a smallest visible size, such that anything below that size, whether a physical object, a visible feature of such an object, e.g., a patch of color, or a relation between such objects, such as their relative size or the distance between them, is invisible. Similarly, there is a lower limit of the perception of sound, a sound level such that any sound below that level is inaudible, and similar minima for the other senses. By analogy, Epicurus and Lucretius argue, there must be a minimum intrinsic size, such that nothing smaller can exist, or even be conceived. The conclusion of the theoretical argument is certainly stronger than anything derivable from the analogy; the former is designed to show a) that it is intrinsically impossible that there should not be a minimum size for physical objects (i.e., intrinsically impossible that physical objects should be theoretically divisible ad infinitum), and b) that theoretical divisibility ad infinitum is inconceivable. All that the analogy of the senses can show is that there is in fact a minimum sensible item for each sense. This may suggest the further arguments that there could not in fact be such a minimum unless there has to be one, and that if there has to be a *minimum sensibile* then there has to be an analogous minimum in thought and in nature. But these suggestions fall short of proof, which requires theoretical argument, as Epicurus's practice acknowledges (see the previously cited passages).

For Epicurus, there is another way in which appearances support the postulation of insensibles such as atoms and void. In his system, beliefs may be either directly confirmed (*epimarturein*, lit. "bear witness in favor of") or directly contradicted (*antimarturein*, lit. "bear witness against") by appearances (DL X.34). A paradigm instance of the former is the confirmation of my belief that that is Socrates by the visual appearance of someone standing in front of me whom I recognize as Socrates. A paradigm instance of the latter is the contradiction of that belief by the appearance of someone standing in front of me whom I recognize not to be Socrates. But in addition to confirmation and contradiction beliefs may be not confirmed or not contradicted (DL ibid.). Non-confirmation occurs when a belief is not directly confirmed by appearances, as when I think that someone in the distance is Plato but am unable to confirm this belief by closer inspection. Clearly, in such a case the belief that the person in the distance is Plato is not contradicted by the appearances either; the appearances simply leave it open whether that person is or is not Plato. It is, therefore, puzzling that Epicurus not only distinguishes non-confirmation from non-contradiction but assigns them significantly different epistemic status. Non-confirmation apparently counts against the acceptance of a belief as true (*Letter to Herodotus*, DL X.50: DL X.34), but Epicurus regularly argues that various propositions of his theory should be accepted on the ground that they are not contradicted by appearances.[7] These propositions include alternative explanations of

celestial events which are equally compatible with the appearances (*Letter to Pythocles*, DL X.85–8) and, significantly for the present context, propositions about non-sensibles such as the infinity of the universe and the nature and motion of *eidôla* (*Letter to Herodotus*, DL X.45–8). The latter cannot be directly confirmed by
p. 138 appearances (as mentioned above), ↳ but Epicurus's generous treatment of non-contradiction allows him to claim for them support from the phenomena.

Appearances cannot, then, be the primary criteria for the truth of the atomic theory, in the sense of providing evidence which guarantees that the theory is true. If they are to be primary, they must be primary in the sense that the concepts of the theory are a) self-evident and b) derived from the senses. E.g., our understanding of the word "atom" includes the grasp of what an atom is and the understanding that atoms exist, both of which have to be self-evident truths provided by the senses.

In the *Letter to Herodotus* (DL X.82) Epicurus divides appearances into universal or general (*koinai*) and particular (*idiai*), saying cryptically that we should pay attention to universal appearances *kata to koinon*—i.e., when the subject-matter is general—and to particular appearances when the subject is particular. Only by doing so will we be able to avoid the mental disturbance generated by false theories of the causes of celestial phenomena, etc. So, false theories such as the theory that celestial phenomena are signs of divine pleasure or displeasure are to be banished by attending to universal appearances of such phenomena, which seem here to be identified with fundamental concepts of correct (i.e., atomistic) astronomical theory, whose connection with sensory appearances is so close that they can themselves be counted as a kind of appearance. Ultimately, these universal appearances will include the universal appearance of atoms.

But here again we encounter the problem that we have no experience of atoms as the theory describes them. The Greek word "*atomos*" means "uncuttable," and we presumably learn the meaning of "uncuttable" by experience of objects which cannot be cut. But the theoretical term "atom" means something theoretically indivisible (in Epicurean theory more strictly, something solid containing theoretically indivisible parts), and those concepts cannot be contents of sensory experience. We extend our concept of "indivisible" from what we encounter in experience, viz. something which cannot (physically) be cut, to something which transcends experience, viz. the concept of what cannot be divided in thought—i.e., of an X such that the description "... is smaller than X" necessarily lacks any application.

5. Preconceptions

We saw in §1 that, in addition to appearances, Epicurus counts preconceptions as a further criterion of truth. DL X.33 lists a number of expressions which Epicureans give as alternative elucidations of the term "preconception": grasp or apprehension (*katalêpsis*), correct opinion, universal understanding or thought laid down (or "stored up" [*ennoia ê katholikê noêsis enapokeimenê*]), elucidating the latter as "memory of what has often appeared from without" (*mnêmê tou pollakis exôthen phanentos*), and giving the example "such and such a thing is a man." Several themes are densely woven together in this passage. First, belief involves the application
p. 139 of general conceptions. Second, if a belief is true, the believer must correctly understand the general ↳ conceptions which he/she applies. Third, general conceptions are produced in the mind by frequent sensory appearances of external things of various types, stored in the mind as memories of those types. Fourth, once such a type of memory—e.g., the memory of what a man is—has been established, the utterance of the general term designating the type ("man") activates that memory in the form of a thought of what the type is a type of ("such and such is a man"). To the fourth point, Diogenes adds the comment, "So for every name the primary thing underlying it (*to prôton hupotetagmenon*) is clear (*enarges*)." The expression "primary thing underlying" echoes Epicurus's terminology in the *Letter to Herodotus* (DL X.37–8, see §1), and the thought appears to be the same, viz. that the conception to which each name is primarily attached is clear—i.e., self-evident. The passage thus presents a simple empiricist picture of the nature of thought and language. Repeated perceptions of external objects build up representations of those things (mental images, conceived as something like pictures), which are stored in the memory. Words are attached to these images as names of the kinds of things the images represent, and it is that attachment which gives those words their meaning. Grasp of that meaning, actualized in the thought of what the kind is, is activated by the utterance of the kind's name. That thought is a precondition of inquiry about things of the kind—e.g., the query "Is that a cow or a horse?" presupposes understanding of what a cow and a horse are.[8]

So much is fairly straightforward, but it remains puzzling in what sense preconceptions are understood as criteria of truth—i.e., marks or standards of the truth of beliefs. If preconceptions are simply general concepts applied in beliefs, then, since all beliefs, true or false, involve the application of general concepts, false beliefs will involve preconceptions no less than true. Moreover, given that understanding of preconceptions, preconceptions themselves may be true or false. So, A may have a preconception of a god as an immaterial being who exercises providential control over the universe, and B (an Epicurean) a preconception of a god as an immortal material being with no concerns beyond its own blessedness. The latter will object that A's conception of a god cannot count as a preconception, since it cannot have been derived from appearances as required by the theory of X.33. It is not a preconception, but a misconception. So, a preconception is not simply a general concept applied in a belief, but a general concept so derived from appearances that the belief in which it is applied is true. It is not, however, clear that B's preconception is any more closely tied to appearances than A's; arguments to the effect that a god can have no care for the state of the world (e.g., because such care would be incompatible with divine self-sufficiency and blessedness) are not *obviously* better supported by appearances than arguments for divine providence, such as the argument from design. Even setting aside that objection, the outcome is that only true conceptions count as preconceptions, and hence as criteria of the truth of beliefs. And since true conceptions can be distinguished from false only by applying the test of whether they are correctly derived from appearances, preconceptions do not appear to be criteria of the truth of beliefs independent of appearances. It may be that Epicurus's division of appearances into general and particular is a dim recognition of this fact.

p. 140 As an appendix to this discussion, we may recall that, according to DL X.31, the Epicurean school recognized "the imaginative applications of thought" as a fourth criterion of truth, in addition to appearances, preconceptions and feelings (see §1). The phrase "imaginative applications of thought" seems to refer to the process of concept formation (described above), in which general conceptions are produced by mental focusing

on images stored in the memory; "imaginative applications" is in this reading equivalent to "applications of thought" (or "of the intellect") to images (*phantasiai*). Since Epicurus himself lists "the present applications of thought" (or "of the intellect") immediately after appearances as sources of our primary conceptions (*Letter to Herodotus*, DL X.38 [see §1]), the impression given in DL X.31 that the school, as distinct from Epicurus himself, added the imaginative applications of thought as a further criterion is probably misleading. The expression seems rather to be an alternative designation of preconceptions, perhaps preferred by the school on account of its fuller explanatory content.

6. Feelings

The remaining criterion is *pathê*—feelings—primarily the feelings of pleasure and distress. These are the sole criterion of choice, and hence the sole ethical criterion of what is to be done and what is to be avoided. But we have seen that Epicurus counts them also as a criterion of truth. He shows no sign of a distinction between a practical guide for choice and avoidance and a theoretical standard of what is to be chosen and what avoided, or, equivalently, of good and bad. He draws no distinction between fact and value: both areas admit of truth and falsehood in judgment, and in both the fundamental criterion is provided by experience, of sensory appearances in the realm of fact, and of pleasure and distress in the realm of value.[9]

7. Conclusion

As described above, Epicurus argues for his crucial thesis both independently of atomist theory and from within it. The independent arguments seek to establish that the only logically available alternatives to the truth of all appearances, viz. the falsity either of all or of some appearances, are alike impossible. It is maintained in §2 that these arguments are unsuccessful. The argument from within the theory rests on Epicurus's technical conception of the truth of appearances as the "photographic" reproduction by appearances of their immediate physical causes, viz. streams of atomic films emitted by external objects and impacting on the sense-organs. That account of appearances avowedly presupposes the fundamental concepts of atomist theory, which are not
 themselves directly derived from experience (see §4). Moreover, the theory of photographic ↳ reproduction itself allows the appearances thus produced to misrepresent how things are, as manifested by the phenomenon of non-doxastic hallucination (see §3).

The upshot appears to be that Epicurus is unable to show that appearances provide the perfect mirror of external reality which is required by the attempted melding of scientific realism with thoroughgoing empiricism. It is doubtful if any theory could meet the demands of that project. The best prospect for a realist is to abandon the idea of a perfect mirror of reality and instead ascribe to experience the more modest role of a fallible, though indispensable, guide to how things are.

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Notes

1. For the Stoics on language and logic, see Castagnoli (this volume) and Crivelli (this volume).

2. Lucretius gives an example of a similar phenomenon, the appearance of the receding columns of a portico seen from one end (IV.426–31).

3. Striker 1990: 145 (footnote), points out that no consensus has yet emerged on the translation of the various technical terms of Hellenistic epistemology. She regularly translates *aisthêsis* as "sense-impression," while noting that it is often translated as either "sensation" or "sense-perception." She also points out that *phantasia* (which I render above as "appearance, image") may be rendered "impression," "presentation," or "appearance."

4. See Everson 1990: 169, "Perceptions, like propositions, are concerned with states of affairs in the world and so are quite properly judged by whether the world is such as it is represented or reported by the perception. This should be apparent if we accept that the proper way to describe perceptions is by reference to their content propositionally expressed. Just as the statement 'It is raining' will be true if and only if it is raining, so the perception that it is raining will be true if it is raining. It is not necessary to postulate propositional items over and above the perception itself for the appraisal of
p. 142 perceptions as true or false to be ↳ appropriate." In a footnote to the above, Everson cites Peacocke 1983: 9 in support: "representational content [of perceptions] concerns the world external to the experience, and as such is assessable as true or false."

5. In fact, Epicurean theory acknowledges that the mind (*animus*) is active in perception, in that it picks out for attention, in the light of established expectations, a selection of the flow of *eidôla* of all kinds which are ceaselessly bombarding the senses. For fuller discussion, see Glidden 1985, esp. 201–7.

6. In Greek legend, Orestes was the son of Agamemnon, King of Argos and commander of the Greek expedition against Troy, and his wife Clytemnestra. On Agamemnon's return from Troy, he was murdered by Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. Having (together with his sister Electra) avenged his father's death by killing his mother, Orestes was subsequently tormented by visions of the goddesses of vengeance, the Furies, terrifying female figures with snakes for hair. Epicurus treats these visions, in common with all sensory and quasi-sensory phenomena, as the product of real *eidôla*-streams, though those streams did not, as Orestes falsely believed, emanate from the bodies of real snake-haired females in his vicinity. The sources do not indicate what Epicurus might have thought were the actual origins of those streams. Perhaps, as Long and Sedley suggest (LS i, 86), the streams arose from the chance concurrence of streams originating from actual women and actual snakes. Another possibility is that they originated from depictions of the Furies in sculpture or painting.

7. Asmis 1999: 286 suggests that the different epistemic status of non-contradiction and non-confirmation depends on whether the belief under examination is a belief about perceptible things or about "non-evident" things; beliefs about perceptible things are verified by appearances and falsified by the lack of confirmatory appearances, whereas beliefs about non-evident things are falsified by appearances and verified by the lack of disconfirming appearances. While that may well be what Epicurus intends, some problems remain. First, on this suggestion, the belief that the person in the distance is Plato still comes out as false, rather than undetermined as to its truth. Second, the most extended source for the Epicurean theory of confirmation, non-confirmation, contradiction, and non-contradiction (Sextus *M* VII.211–16 = LS 18A), explains non-contradiction not as the absence of appearances which contradict the belief in something non-evident, but as the presence of appearances from which the truth of the belief follows. (Here is an example: motion occurs [something evident]; if motion occurs, there must be a void; therefore, there is a void [something non-evident].) The same argument generates contradiction of the contradictory belief, that there is no void. So, on this construal of non-contradiction (which Long and Sedley take to arise from misunderstanding by Sextus of the Epicurean sources [LS i, 94–7]), non-contradiction of P is equivalent to contradiction of not-P. This still leaves out of account those cases, such as celestial phenomena, where multiple alternative explanations, none of which is contradicted by what is evident, are all counted as true. To account for these, some other principles must be assumed—e.g., that in an infinite universe every possible explanation must be true of some particular instance or other of a given kind (see Asmis 1999: 289, LS i, 95–6). That principle does not, of course, determine which is the true explanation of any particular instance, but it appears that both Epicurus himself and his school were content to accept that limitation (*Letter to Pythocles* DL X.85–8 = LS 18C; Lucretius V.509–33 = LS 18D).

8. On preconceptions in Epicurean theory cf. Asmis (this volume).

9. See Mitsis (this volume).

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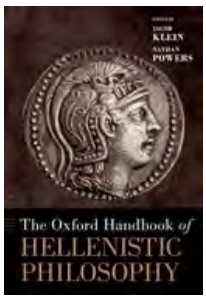
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CHAPTER

6 Epicureans on Freedom and Responsibility

James Warren

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Abstract

This chapter presents and evaluates the Epicureans' account of voluntary action and moral responsibility, and the grounds for that account in Epicurean psychology, physics, logic, and metaphysics. The Epicureans think that we often act as we do because of our beliefs, desires, and character and that we should be held responsible for such actions. In order to make this compatible with their cosmology, they infer that there must be a novel form of atomic motion ("the swerve") and present a surprising view on the logic of future-tensed propositions. The Epicureans also produce arguments against the possibility of advancing a determinist argument. The remains in the Herculean papyri of Epicurus's *On Nature* Book 25, although fragmentary and often frustrating, suggest that he offered a detailed account of how we develop psychologically so as to be able to perform actions rightly said to be "up to us."

Keywords: determinism, responsibility, atomism, swerve, psychology, preconception, Epicurus, Lucretius

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Epicurus thinks that we often act as we do because of our beliefs, desires, and character and that we should be held responsible for such actions. For example, people act in certain ways because they falsely believe that death will be bad for them, and irascible people are said to act in characteristic ways because of their underlying disposition. In these cases, the agents concerned are responsible for what they do, and we are able to evaluate them on that basis. Further, Epicurus insisted that we have a "preconception" (*prolêpsis*) of our capacity for voluntary action.[1] Since these preconceptions are one of Epicurus's criteria of truth, then we must accept that we do indeed have such a capacity for voluntary action.[2] This capacity is crucial for Epicurus's ethical project since the Epicureans claim that we often act in ways that are not consonant with living a properly good life and that we can live good lives only if we learn various truths about the world and about what is of genuine value. We can be taught to be Epicureans, and being an Epicurean makes you act in ways that

promote living a good life. Whether we live a good life is up to us, and it is reasonable to evaluate people according to how they act and what they believe; we should rebuke people for acting badly and praise those who do well.

This position comes under threat in various ways. First, there was a long-standing thought that perhaps some of the things that we do or suffer from are inevitable. Perhaps they are fated to happen because of some kind of divine plan. Oedipus, for example, was fated to kill his father and marry his mother despite (or, perhaps, tragically because of) the attempts his family made to prevent that terrible outcome. Since the Epicurean gods live a life of tranquility that is incompatible with them caring about such human affairs, there will be theological reasons for rejecting such fears.[3] But there is also a threat from the philosophical view that everything that happens is somehow necessary in the sense that it cannot be avoided because its causes can be traced back ad infinitum in an inexorable chain. If this view is true, then it makes what we do just the result of a chain of necessary causes and effects that can be traced back to well before our births and therefore precludes
p. 145 any reasonable thought that we should ourselves be held as the cause of what ↳ we do. And this is particularly worrying for Epicurus because his own preferred philosophy of nature—his atomist physics—looks like a prime candidate for the sort of view that threatens human freedom and responsibility in this way. If all things —including human agents—are composed of everlasting atoms forever moving and colliding in the void, then it seems possible that all that we do can be explained as the inevitable result of physical processes that proceed according to unchanging laws.

1. Voluntary Action in an Epicurean World

Epicurus addresses these concerns in the *Letter to Menoeceus*, the summary of his ethical philosophy that is included in Book 10 of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*:

> Whom, after all, do you consider superior to the man who … would deride the [fate] which some introduce as master of everything, [but sees that some things are necessitated], others are due to fortune (*apo tukhês*), and others depend on us (*par' hêmas*), since necessity (*anagkê*) is accountable to no one (*anupeuthunon*), and fortune is an unstable thing to watch, while that which depends on us, with which blame and its opposite are naturally associated, is free of any master (*adespoton*)? For it would be better to follow the mythology about gods than to be a slave to the "fate" (*heimarmenê*) of the natural philosophers (*phusikoi*): the former at least hints at the hope of begging the gods off by means of worship, whereas the latter involves an inexorable necessity (*anagkê*).
>
> (*Letter to Menoeceus* 133–4; trans. Long and Sedley, with modifications)

The correct view is set out first: some things occur by necessity, some things are due to chance, and some other things depend on us; this third category includes actions for which blame and praise are appropriate. Epicurus then further explains the difference between these three categories using political terminology. Necessity is "accountable to no one" (*anupeuthenos*); unlike Athenian magistrates who are required to submit account (*euthunai*) for scrutiny and evaluation at the end of their term of office, there is no reasonable criticism, praise, or blame of what is simply necessary. Epicurus does not explain what precisely he means by "chance," but it must mean something more than what is simply unexpected or unusual. Some ancient reports concerning the earlier atomism of Democritus and Leucippus claim that they assigned events such as the formation of a cosmos to chance; others insist that they assigned all things to necessity.[4] In *On Nature* Book 25 Epicurus himself may have claimed that Democritus made "necessity and accident" (*anagkê kai tautomaton*) the cause of everything.[5] Attributing an event to "chance" may therefore mean various things: that the event comes about
p. 146 without intent or design, that we cannot know why the event occurred, or that an event occurs randomly or ↳ without any cause.[6] However we understand it here, Epicurus is sure that actions due to chance cannot be

subject to the relevant sort of ethical evaluation; it makes no more sense to praise or blame something that happens by chance than it does something that happens by necessity.[7] That leaves just what depends on us (*par' hêmas*): the category of actions and states to which criticism and praise are relevant. In this case, since there is no master superior to each of us to whom responsibility should be assigned, we are ourselves properly thought to be in control of these matters. For these things, each of us is our own master.

Epicurus then continues by distinguishing two reasons why someone might abandon this approach and instead adopt the wrong view. Perhaps our actions are subject to the whims of gods. Perhaps instead we are compelled by some brute natural necessity of the kind that certain natural philosophers (*phusikoi*) endorse.[8] Both of these views would subject us to the domination of some external force, either divine will or physical necessity. Neither of these views is correct, according to Epicurus, but the first kind is preferable since it at least leaves open the possibility of us retaining some form of agency by pleading with our divine masters and persuading them to change their mind. The view that all things are necessitated by natural forces rules out even this. Nevertheless, both positions can be rejected because they are inconsistent with our preconception of our capacity for voluntary action and consequent sense of responsibility.

It also follows that whatever account the Epicureans offer of the relationship between human souls and the rest of the physical world must be consistent with that preconception since preconception is a criterion of truth. As we shall see, this principle of philosophical methodology drives the Epicureans' willingness to posit otherwise surprising exceptions to their accounts of atomic motion and the truth-value of certain kinds of propositions. All such claims are justified as being the best way of accommodating the unquestionable preconception that we are capable of actions for which we can be held responsible.

In general terms, things are "up to us" in so far as we are responsible for those actions because the actions are caused by us, our beliefs and our character, and are not compelled by external factors beyond our control. We have already seen that Epicurus characterizes those actions for which we are responsible as being actions that are *par' hêmas* (*Letter to Menoeceus* 133–4); here the *para* preposition expresses what causes the action: those actions that are *par' hêmas* are contrasted with those that are caused by chance, divine whim, or natural necessity. All such things are out of our control; if we are compelled to act by such factors, then this is incompatible with us being responsible for what we do. Epicurus interprets the claim that an action occurs by necessity as the claim that it occurs by force or compulsion: we cannot be held responsible for those of our actions that occur in this way. Similarly, we cannot be held responsible for things that occur by chance. But not all our actions are caused in these two ways, and so there are actions that are "up to us" for which we can be praised or blamed.[9]

The outline of Epicurus's position so far is relatively clear. Unfortunately, the details of Epicurus's defense of this category of things that are *par' hêmas* are much harder to discern. And he certainly does need to offer some
p. 147 kind of defense since his own ↳ physical theory of atomism seems to require that, given that we too are composed of atomic complexes of body and soul, our actions and states will be the result of the motions of those atoms. And since those atoms are everlasting and their interactions purely mechanical, their current position and motions seem to be the result of chains of necessary cause and effect that stretch back unimaginably far and also to necessitate their positions and motions in the future. In short, Epicurus's own physical and psychological theory appears to give support to those who think that our actions are the result of necessity: precisely the position that he rejects in the *Letter to Menoeceus*. How, in that case, does Epicurus avoid this embarrassing inconsistency? The answer is most likely to be found in two places: Lucretius's Epicurean poem *De rerum natura* and Epicurus's monumental prose work *On Nature*, which was Lucretius's principal philosophical source.[10]

2. Lucretius and the Swerve

Epicurus held the view that the atoms out of which all things are composed move not only as a result of the collisions between atoms and their weight.[11] In addition, he asserted that atoms might "swerve," changing their direction by just a minimum spatial extension.[12] One of the arguments for this additional form of motion is that unless atoms swerve in this way, then we would indeed be subject to the necessitating compulsion which he accused (in *Letter to Menoeceus* 133) the natural philosophers of mistakenly positing. This atomic swerve (in Greek: *paregklisis*; in Latin: *clinamen*) therefore seems to be his answer to the apparent inconsistency between his insistence that some actions are "up to us" and his own natural philosophy. The swerve is not mentioned in any extant work by Epicurus himself but it is mentioned by Lucretius and Diogenes of Oenoanda (fr. 54 Smith) as well as by critics of Epicureanism such as Cicero, who clearly found the notion laughably absurd and a sure sign of Epicurus's desperation in the face of his own natural theory.[13] The longest surviving Epicurean treatment of the topic is in Lucretius's Book 2 (2.251–93) but this passage has proved to be frustrating for those interested in Epicurus's account of responsibility, in part because Lucretius's principal interest is not in questions of responsibility at all but rather in establishing that there are three kinds of atomic motion: weight, collision, and the swerve.[14] He explains that this third kind—the swerve—must be included because, were atoms not to deviate sometimes from their course, then it would indeed be true that there could be no "*libera voluntas*" in animals (2.256–7). If there were no atomic swerves, then all our actions would be compelled because all atomic motions, including those within our souls, could be traced back in infinite chains of necessary consequence to events not only external to us but also predating our births. His mention of *libera voluntas*, often misleadingly translated as "free will," promises much but in fact offers rather little. The passage does nothing to explain how animals can act voluntarily besides saying that a necessary condition of them doing so is that atomic motion is not decided solely by weight and prior collisions.

Lucretius in fact does nothing to argue for voluntary agency; he assumes that there is such a thing and simply infers from it a necessary consequence for our understanding of how atoms move. In those very same lines, Lucretius characterizes *voluntas*—itself perhaps best understood as "voluntary action" rather than a distinct psychological power or faculty—as both *libera* and also "*fatis avulsa*" (257): "wrested away from fate."[15] The emphasis is again squarely on our being free from thoroughgoing external compulsion. We can be the originating cause of actions that are not forced upon us by an infinite chain of previous atomic motions and collisions.

Lucretius also describes the atomic swerve as occurring "at no determined time or place" (*nec tempore certo | nec regione loci certa*, 2.259–60), which has been taken by critics of the Epicureans since antiquity to be the claim that the swerve happens randomly in the sense of being a spontaneous, uncaused, and wholly unpredictable event. That would of course be a problem if the swerve is itself supposed to be the cause of evaluable human actions since it is no better to be subject to random events than to an infinite series of necessitating ones. We can easily see how critics such as Cicero, presumably building on concerns raised by earlier Academics such as Carneades, are able to portray the swerve in an unflattering light. True, we are no longer subject to compulsion, they will say, but we have exchanged the compulsion of necessitated atomic motions for mere randomness in the form of an "uncaused motion," namely the swerve. Epicurus has tried to avoid determinism but instead has to assert that there can be uncaused motions and has exchanged determinism for randomness.

There are ways to resist this criticism. Lucretius says that the atomic swerve is not itself determined; otherwise, it would offer nothing different from the mechanical determinism it is supposed to qualify (*DRN* 2.251–60). But the fact that the timing and location of a swerve are not predetermined by mechanical necessity does not entail that swerves occur randomly or are uncaused.[16] Perhaps, as some have argued, swerves are caused in some other fashion, perhaps by the agent (or the agent's soul) exerting a "downward" causation on its own constituent atoms, making them deviate from their previous course. Unfortunately, Lucretius offers us no

further help. This passage insists that the swerve ensures that the current state of the world, and the current state of a person's soul, are not the result solely of a rigidly necessitated infinite series of prior atomic collisions. But various things remain unclear. It is not clear how often a swerve occurs. Further, it is not clear whether a swerve occurs because an animal decides to initiate some action or whether the swerve in some other way offers an opportunity to be exploited when an animal chooses to act. It is easy to see why, in that case, there have been so many different proposals offered for the connection between the swerve and our capacity for voluntary action.[17] Indeed, Carneades is said to have advised the Epicureans to retract the theory of the atomic swerve. In place of that embarrassing speculation, they should insist that a voluntary motion of the mind is possible and say that they agree that no motion is uncaused but do not accept that all events are due to antecedent and external causes (Cicero, *De Fato* 23). This, no doubt partly mischievous, suggestion does have some merit given the long history of interpretations which have made this curious notion play a central role—
p. 149 which it probably should not be granted—in accounts ↳ of Epicurus's philosophy of freedom and responsibility. However, for the Epicureans to accept Carneades's advice would amount to their refusing to say anything at all about the atomic physics of the psychology of voluntary action. Perhaps that is nevertheless the better course. The Epicureans could stick to what they are sure of, namely that we are indeed responsible for some of our actions, but admit that how that is possible remains mysterious: the physics can be left aside to be investigated only if it turns out to be necessary to do so. But the Epicureans do seem to have felt some pressure to say something about how their atomism does not commit them to the universal necessity they detected and criticized in the theories of other *phusikoi*, including earlier atomists. Their argument for the swerve is therefore best thought of as an interesting case of a general Epicurean methodological principle. Epicurus infers that there must be the atomic swerve, a non-evident (*adêlon*) event that cannot be directly confirmed by observation, on the basis that it is a necessary condition of what he can observe and knows to be true (see, e.g., Epicurus *Ep. Pyth.* 85–8, Sextus Empiricus *M* 7.211–16). The Epicureans take it to have been established that atomism is a true account of the basic nature of things, and they also take it to be true, as confirmed by our preconception, that we have the capacity for voluntary action. Given that these are both true, then they must be compatible and there must therefore be some appropriate story about the non-evident behavior of atoms consistent with both. At the very least, it must be the case that atoms do not move only because of necessitating chains of prior motions and collisions. Given the observed regularities of natural processes, we can also be sure that swerves do not happen in such a way as to threaten the general natural laws. The tiny (*exiguum*: Lucretius 2.292) swerve must be a deviation sufficient to break the necessity that is incompatible with voluntary action but not so great as to produce deviations in other natural processes contrary to what we observe.[18]

3. The Evidence from *On Nature* Book 25

The discussion of Epicurean accounts of responsibility and freedom is further complicated by the presence of tantalizing scraps of evidence from Epicurus's *On Nature* Book 25, some of which appears to have been dedicated to relevant topics. Unfortunately, the evidence is extremely difficult to interpret, even once a stable text has been produced—itself no small endeavor. The text we have is open to different reconstructions, which in turn lead to different translations and interpretations; different overall interpretations also often guide interpreters to begin with different reconstructions of the text.[19]

Some things are generally agreed. There certainly is an interest in this book in the atomic constitution of the soul and the way in which a human soul changes, develops, acquires memories, and so on as an atomic
p. 150 compound interacting with other atomic ↳ compounds in the external world. The possibility of such psychological development is part of Epicurus's account of how human beings become responsible for some of what they do as they become critical rational agents. According to some commentators, there is also an explicit interest in the metaphysical relationship between psychic states and the physical nature of the soul; on this view, Epicurus is interested in giving some account of the properties and capacities of a soul and of a living

human being, and of their metaphysical relationship to the arrangements of atoms out of which the soul is composed.

The presence of an interest in the metaphysical nature of mental states would be consonant with some of the evidence from other Epicurean texts in at least two ways. First, we know that the Epicureans were interested in how various properties arise from atomic arrangements without being properties of individual atoms. Epicurus has a vocabulary for properties (for example, color) of bodies that are not properties of the atoms that compose those bodies, and he distinguishes two kinds of such properties, calling them "accidents" (*sumptômata*; Latin: *coniuncta*) and attributes (*sumbebêkota*; Latin: *eventa*) (Epicurus *Letter to Herodotus* 40, 68–71; cf. Lucretius 1.449–58 and 2.730–864).[20] Further, Lucretius gives a separate argument dedicated to denying psychological properties to individual atoms. Those properties and capacities—such as the capacities to perceive or to feel pleasure and pain—belong to living animals that are themselves complex groupings of atoms of certain kinds and are present only so long as the appropriate atoms are arranged in the correct way (2.865–1022). The soul itself is a mixture (*krasis* or *krama*) of certain kinds of atoms arranged in a very particular fashion: *Letter to Herodotus* 63, Lucretius 3.177–287.[21] Second, we know that the Epicureans were sometimes interested in accounting for psychological facts in terms of the atoms that compose certain kinds of souls. For example, Lucretius explains how certain psychological traits (e.g., timidity) should be thought to arise from certain kinds of atoms predominating in the soul. This allows him to explain not only differences in temperament between species but also between different members of the same species. The soul of a lion, for example, is marked by the presence of atoms associated with fire and heat while the nervous soul of a stag is marked by the presence of atoms associated with cold (3.288–306). It seems natural, therefore, to suppose that the Epicureans would also be interested in exploring the metaphysical relationship between psychological capacities such as memory and agency, and the atomic structure of the soul.

The discussion in *On Nature* 25 is not only made difficult by the state of preservation of the text and the difficult or awkward prose style of even the more intact sections. Epicurus also uses a series of terms that mark distinctions that are crucial for his theory, but those terms are either never clarified or were explained in some missing part of the text. In particular, there is a regular distinction drawn between, on the one hand, what Epicurus labels a *sustasis* ("constitution")— sometimes this is amplified in references to a "first" constitution (*prôtê sustasis*) or an "initial" constitution (*hê ex arkhês sustasis*)—and, on the other hand, *apogegennêmena* (literally: "things that have come to be out of …," "developments"). The interpretation of this pair of alternatives
p. 151 is intimately connected with the preferred interpretation of Epicurus's principal interests in the book, ↳ and the disagreements over the latter drive disagreements over the former.[22] On one view of *On Nature* 25, Epicurus is directly addressing the question of the metaphysics of mental states and the possibility of psycho-physical "downward" causation. On this view, the contrast between the two is a distinction between the *sustasis* or underlying atomic material structure of the soul and the *apogegennêmena*, things that have "arisen out of" that underlying structure, where this "arising out of" is understood to be a metaphysical relationship. This relationship is then understood either as a form of radical emergence, or a kind of supervenience, or as something quite compatible with the view that the Epicureans were committed to a generally reductionist metaphysical outlook; the discussion here becomes tangled in part because of some overarching differences of opinion about the Epicureans' overall metaphysical stance and also because the interpretations do not always share precise understandings of the metaphysical terminology being used.[23] In any event, the suggestion is that among the properties that arise or emerge from the underlying atomic arrangements are the capacities for autonomous action required for agents to be properly responsible for what they do. Just how this works and whether it requires a special kind of "downward" or psycho-physical causation (and whether good sense can be made of that within the general framework of Epicurean metaphysics) are yet further questions. Somehow the atomic swerve is involved but, again, there are differing views about how it is involved and how successful that account turns out to be.

An alternative view of the way in which Epicurus approaches questions of responsibility in *On Nature* 25 might be labeled the "developmental psychology" approach. This account sees the emphasis in this book not so much on a metaphysical question of the nature of mental states and their powers—particularly the power to exert "downward causation" on the constituent atoms—but on the way in which humans develop and change psychologically as they grow and mature. On this view, the contrast between the "first constitution" and "developments" (that is: [*prôtê*] *sustasis* and *apogegennêmena*) is not a contrast between underlying atomic arrangements and supervenient or emergent properties but a chronological contrast between the mental states and capacities a person begins with at birth, and the later changes and developments in that person. This avoids to a large part any detailed engagements with Epicurus's account—whatever it was—of the metaphysical relationship between atoms and psychological properties since it sees his emphasis as falling squarely on the agent as a cause in so far as the agent is free from various forms of external compulsion, including compulsion from an inherited or starting disposition. The question whether and how an agent, as it were, in each case of voluntary action forces the atoms of their own soul into new motions is set aside. What matters instead is an account of how an agent and their beliefs, desires, and the like are not entirely at the mercy of external influences and a starting natural state. The emphasis is on the way in which we all, through the exercise of our rational powers, are able to shape and mold ourselves so as to create a character and set of beliefs capable of living a good life and how we can use our critical rational powers to alter and improve ourselves. No one is doomed to be a slave to their inherited make-up and environment.[24]

p. 152 To illustrate the interpretative controversy and the difficulty of the material, here are two passages over which interpreters have repeatedly clashed. The first passage seems to offer a glimpse of a metaphysical distinction between something produced by the atoms and the atoms themselves (trans. Laursen, with modifications):

> In this way, whenever something is produced (*apogenêthêi ti*) that takes on some difference (*heterotêta*) from the atoms in some way that can be distinguished (*kata tina tropon dialêpton*), not the one from a different distance, it gets the cause (*aitian*) out of itself; then it immediately brings that to the first natures and makes the whole of it somehow one.[25]

Most every word in this difficult passage has been scrutinized and every part of the difficult syntax has been disputed. The verb at the beginning of the passage quoted (*apogenêthêi*) is related to one of the central terms in this part of *On Nature* 25—*apogegennêmena*—and so we may perhaps find here some helpful illumination of what those "products" are. The interest is, of course, in the tantalizing promise of a statement of some kind of novel metaphysical item that is produced from the atoms and is distinct from the atoms in a special way so that it can exert a causal influence of its own, providing some kind of unifying effect, and perhaps exerting an influence over the very atoms out of which it was produced. That final suggestion of a kind of "downward" psycho-physical causation is what has drawn many commentators to wrestle with this section of *On Nature* 25. Unfortunately, the text is not able to bear the weight required for this approach; it is compatible with various alternative interpretations including one that sees here, albeit expressed in Epicurus's characteristic style, the familiar thought that at a certain point in our development we acquire the rational capacity to begin to mold and alter our character. This process will obviously have repercussions for our underlying atomic make-up but, most importantly, as we mature in this way we become the principal causes of our actions.[26] Compare that passage with the following, from just a little later in the book (trans. Laursen):

> [F]rom the very first beginning seeds leading at any given time, some to this, some to that, some to both, whether that be actions and thoughts and dispositions, to a greater or smaller extent. Consequently, at some time it precisely depends on us (*par' hêmas*) that the product (*to apogegennêmenon*) becomes such and such and it depends on us or rather on the beliefs (that are formed) out of ourselves that what flows in through the pores with necessity from what surrounds us at some point of time becomes (such or such) …[27]

This passage offers more support for the developmental approach and once again discusses the *apogegennêmena*. It would be odd for these to be emergent psychic properties and powers in this case since Epicurus appears to say here that the "product" (*to apogegennêmenon*) depends on us (is *par' hêmas*). If the
p. 153 product here is ↳ a product in a metaphysical sense—a higher-level item that supervenes on or emerges from the underlying constitution of atoms—it is absurd to suggest that such production is "up to us" in the now familiar sense that we can be reasonably held responsible for it.

The lacunose and difficult text of *On Nature* 25, even when longer stretches are preserved, will in all likelihood continue to attract a variety of competing interpretations. Even if what I have called the developmental approach in the end appears to make better sense of the majority of the texts available and indeed fits well with a general understanding of the specific form of responsibility which Epicurus is emphasizing, it may well appear to omit something important that the metaphysical approach attempts to provide. It is, after all, a good philosophical question how an agent, composed of a body and soul, each of which is an arrangement of atoms, can have the power to initiate new motions. Epicurus perhaps had something to say on that matter that has not survived. Alternatively, he may have left this as a lacuna in his account, confident enough that his atomic cosmology and the existence of undetermined voluntary action must be compatible. Nevertheless, if on his view an agent is responsible for an action because the causal role of the agent cannot be entirely explained by reference to external compulsion and congenital or inherited psychological states, then we might still press for an account of how an agent may voluntarily acquire certain beliefs rather than others or how individual acts contribute to the development of a new psychological disposition.

Over time, people develop and change psychologically. As we mature, we acquire capacities for memory, reflection, and evaluation that we lacked as infants. We also acquire new beliefs and discard others; we form certain habits and psychological traits, preferences, and so on. And then our actions are caused by us in the sense that they are caused by those beliefs, traits, and so on rather than by some external compulsion.[28] Epicurus may think that, to show that we are responsible for the changes in our soul and that those changes are not necessary or compelled, it is enough to point to the fact that we do develop and change as we age. But there are various questions we can still pose. For example, is it necessary for Epicurus also to show that we are responsible for the acquisition and development of those psychological traits which he cites as the reason why certain actions are properly said to be *par' hêmas*? Is it "up to us" to acquire the traits which in turn justify our actions being "up to us"? The Epicureans themselves often point to the unfortunate damage to our well-being caused by acquired cultural beliefs and the behaviors they encourage.[29] Lucretius, for example, imagines someone whose behavior stems from a hidden and misguided belief that death is bad—a belief which the person does not recognize he holds and indeed will even deny that he accepts. Nevertheless, Lucretius is prepared to criticize the person for acting in this way (3.870–9). Epicurus places a great deal of faith in our critical reasoning powers as guarantors of voluntary action and responsibility while also recognizing that we often acquire and hold beliefs without being fully aware of them.[30]

p. 154 4. The Self-Refutation of Determinism

Epicurus also went on the attack against those who denied the existence of voluntary action and instead embraced the "inexorable necessity" he mentions in *Letter to Menoeceus* 134. Here is a concise formulation of one of his arguments against a determinist.

> The man who says that all events are necessitated (*kat' anagkên ginesthai*) has no ground for criticizing (*ouden egkalein echein*) the man who says that not all events are necessitated. For according to him this is itself a necessitated event (*kat' anagkên ginesthai*).
>
> (Epicurus, *Vatican Saying* 40 = LS 20D, trans. Long and Sedley)

Here we imagine a discussion between two people: one who says that all things occur by necessity and another who says that not all things occur by necessity. The specific charge is that it is not legitimate for the determinist—let us use this term as shorthand for anyone who says that all things occur by necessity—to criticize his opponent for taking the opposite stance and therefore that any determinist who does criticize his opponent is acting in a way inconsistent with his own thesis. According to the determinist's own thesis, since all things occur by necessity, then it is also by necessity that his opponent takes the opposite stance just as it is by necessity, as a matter of fact, that he takes the determinist stance he does. It would be wrong, in that case, for someone to advance the thesis that all of our actions are caused by compulsion and necessity but also take credit for having grasped this truth and criticize others for not having done so. For to do so is for the determinist to credit both participants in the discussion with a responsibility for their views that is denied by the thesis he is promoting.

Epicurus begins by assuming that it is legitimate to criticize someone only if that person is responsible for the action or belief being criticized. Since Epicurus, we know, does not think that all things are necessitated and since he thinks that it is reasonable to criticize—or praise—people for some of what they do, then it is legitimate for him to criticize a determinist for holding that incorrect view. But the determinist is not in the same position. Since the thesis he is trying to advance precisely denies that anyone is responsible for their beliefs and actions, then he cannot both advance that view in an attempt to persuade someone else to adopt it and also criticize those who do not or do praise others—including himself—who accept it. Epicurus's argument also assumes that if everything comes about "by necessity," then this precludes individual agents from being responsible for their actions and beliefs. There are, of course, various ways in which this assumption can be resisted. The Stoics, for example, maintain that although in a sense all things are fated and necessitated, there is nevertheless a reasonable sense in which individual agents may be held responsible for some of what they do. This compatibilist stance is not addressed by Epicurus, and he may well have thought it incoherent. In any
p. 155 case, clearly, the sense of "by necessity" assumed in this brief argument ↳ is intended to mark one of a pair of exclusive claims: if some action occurs by necessity, then it is not legitimate to praise or blame an agent for doing it.[31]

This *Vatican Saying* is a condensed version of an argument presented at greater length in Epicurus's *On Nature* 25. Again, there are significant difficulties in determining the precise text, and the often lacunose papyri make it hard to be sure of the transitions from one point to the next, but the general outlines of the argument are sufficiently clear. First, Epicurus provides once again a general argument against those who say that all things come to be by necessity and also criticize others for not holding this view. Here is Laursen's translation of his 1997 text, with some minor modifications:[32]

> … admonish and fight and rearrange each other as having the cause (*aitia*) also in themselves and not only in the original constitutions and in the mechanical necessity (*to automaton anagkêi*) of what surrounds us and enters into us. For if one ascribes the mechanical necessity also to admonishing and being admonished … understand, when he rebukes and praises, but if he did that, he would be deserting the action which we have in mind in the case of ourselves in accordance with the preconception of the cause, and he would have changed the name [only] …
>
> … For the argument is turned upside down (*perikatô trepetai*) and cannot even confirm that all the things called "necessary" (*kat' anagkên*) really are such, but he is in conflict with somebody in this very matter, on the hypothesis that he acts foolishly on his own initiative. Even if he were to say *ad infinitum* that he does this necessarily on the basis of arguments in each case, he does not make a reasoned assessment (*epilogizetai*) in that he refers the cause to himself for having reasoned correctly but to his opponent for not having reasoned correctly. And if he does not end with himself but refers to necessity, he would not even …

Here again we see the same strategy that was employed with much greater concision in *Vatican Saying* 40: there is a conflict between accepting the hypothesis that all things occur by necessity and rebuking someone for doing something wrong. Although it is hard to be sure, there may also be signs here that Epicurus pursued the discussion a step further by noting that the determinist cannot save their position by admitting that the criticism aimed at the opponent is itself necessitated and that it is indeed necessitated that the opponent should hold their respective view. Any attempt to claim that he has reasoned correctly and that his opponent has not is in conflict, Epicurus maintains, with the determinist's general thesis that all things occur by necessity. Epicurus claims that this kind of a *logos* (argument, claim) is completely overturned (*perikatô trepetai*), a phrase borrowed from the terminology of wrestling and describing how the determinist has been turned around and upside down because his actions in arguing against an opponent rely on him denying the very thesis he is attempting to promote.[33]

This general account of the incompatibility of both holding a determinist thesis and also trying to persuade others to change their minds while holding them responsible for their attitude to that very thesis next leads Epicurus to discuss a specific set of philosophers. Though Epicurus does not name them, he evidently has a
p. 156 particular ↳ group in mind. They too hold that all things occur by necessity but deserve some special attention (the following is Laursen's translation, with modifications):

> … But those who from the beginning gave sufficient explanations of causes (*hoi de aitologêsantes ex archês hikanôs*) and differed not only from their predecessors but also in many ways from their successors were not aware that although they in many things lifted off great burdens (*en pollois megala kouphisantes*) they [contradicted] themselves in this one respect that they claimed that necessity and … are the cause of everything. The argument teaching this broke down itself and this escaped the man, as he was clashing with his actions against his belief, and unless some kind of forgetting of the belief came in as regards the actions, he would have been disturbing himself constantly, and in as much as the part of his belief prevailed, he would fall into great calamities, and in as much as it did not prevail, he would be full of crisis because of the opposition between his actions and his belief …[34]

Certain philosophers are praised for having stood apart not only from their predecessors but also many philosophers who came after them. This praise is tempered by the claim that these philosophers are faced with an inconsistency between their belief in a general account of causation and their own actions. The belief seems to be the conviction that all things are the result of necessity (and perhaps chance), while the "actions" are presumably any that require a commitment to the idea that some actions are "up to us," including the provision of ethical advice as well as self-praise and criticism. It is not hard to imagine candidates (perhaps recalling the *phusikoi* of *Ep. Men.* 134) for those Epicurus has in mind.[35] Certainly, his predecessors in establishing the atomist theory—Leucippus and Democritus—often come in for a combination of praise and criticism in Epicurean texts. They can reasonably be said to have stood out in comparison with those who came before and after (except Epicurus himself) and to have lightened our burden by showing that there is no need to attribute the observed processes of change in the world to a designing or creative god or other power.[36] But the earlier atomists are also associated with the slogan that all things occur by necessity (or, sometimes, by necessity and chance). Fortunately, Epicurus has been able to correct their failures. Diogenes of Oenoanda (fr. 54.III.4 Smith) names Democritus as the originator of atomic theory and explains that it does not, in fact, offer support to those who claim that all things occur by necessity because it has now been augmented by Epicurus's discovery of the atomic swerve.[37]

The presence of this section in *On Nature* 25 is sometimes taken as evidence that Epicurus closely engaged with metaphysical questions concerning whether an atomist cosmology requires the reduction of psychic states to physical states or perhaps even the elimination of psychic states altogether. This is perhaps support for those who see in the text a metaphysical account of psycho-physical causation as the basis for the exercise of an

agent's free will. Certainly, there are Epicurean texts that quarrel with the earlier atomists on such topics. But even if this section does point to an earlier form of atomism as facing serious problems on this score, we need not assume that Epicurus's focus throughout the book is on the problem of free will in an atomist universe. The
p. 157 form of the argument we saw in *Vatican Saying* 40 does not require that the imagined opponent ↳ who proposes the claim that all things are necessitated subscribe to any particular physical theory. To be sure, Epicurus may need to distance himself from Democritus and Leucippus for fear of being taken to share their views, and that is most likely why they are invoked allusively here, where Epicurus mixes his criticism with praise. But they are not the sole targets of his criticism.

5. The Logic of Future-Tensed Propositions

Finally, let us briefly consider how Epicurus's commitment to the preconception of our moral responsibility affects his philosophical stance in another area. Epicurus held that the future is in part contingent: there are some things that will happen in the future that are not now necessitated, and there are some things that will not happen in the future which are not now impossible. He appears to have thought that this requires us to think about truth in a certain way, specifically about the truth or falsehood of each of a pair of contradictory assertions about the future. There are some such pairs, he decided, in which it is not necessary that one of them be true and the other false. Cicero cheerfully ridicules this view:

> Of any two contradictories—by contradictories here I mean a pair one of which asserts something while the other denies it—it is necessary, *pace* Epicurus, that one be true, the other false: for example, "Philoctetes will be wounded" was true in all previous ages, and "Philoctetes will not be wounded" false. Unless perhaps we're inclined to follow the opinion of the Epicureans, who say that such propositions are neither true nor false, or, when that shames them, say something still more shameless, namely that disjunctions of contradictories are true, but that of the original propositions contained in them neither is true.
>
> (Cicero, *De Fato* 37; trans. Long and Sedley)[38]

Consider the propositions (1) "Philoctetes will be wounded" and (2) "Philoctetes will not be wounded." Given that they are contradictories, it ought to be the case that one of them is true and the other false. But Epicurus denied that either of them is true and that either of them is false even though he did accept that (3) "Either Philoctetes will be wounded or Philoctetes will not be wounded" must be true. If proposition (1) is true, Epicurus thinks, then it is inevitable that Philoctetes will be wounded and indeed it has been necessitated for all time since (1) has always been true and the past is fixed and necessary; but if proposition (2) is true, then it is impossible and has always been impossible for Philoctetes to be wounded.[39] But how Philoctetes fares in the battle should at least in part be "up to" Philoctetes himself and therefore cannot be necessitated in this way. Epicurus is sufficiently convinced of the fact of some things being "up to us" that he is prepared to assert the
p. 158 violation of what would otherwise appear to be rigid rules; ↳ Cicero wastes no time in labeling this sheer effrontery and a simple ignorance of logic (*De Fato* 38).[40]

The assumption underlying Epicurus's unease seems to be that if, for example, (1) is true, then it is true now, and if it is true now, then there must be some fact about how the world is now that makes it true; in that way, we move from the truth-value of a future-tensed proposition to some fact about the world now that ensures that the event described will happen. For some future-tensed propositions, this is not a problem since they do refer to future events that are indeed guaranteed or made impossible by how the world is now, for example, (4) "When I throw this ball into the air, it will fall back to the ground." Such things are important for any view in which we can reasonably make predictions about the world and the behavior of things in it. But for propositions concerning things which Epicurus includes among those that are "up to us," the threat of

necessity usurping the agent's responsibility appeared to him to be too great. Since we have an unquestionable preconception that there are some things that are "up to us," then we must recognize an important qualification to these logical rules. This is another example of the strategy that Epicurus employed elsewhere. He takes it to be true that some things are "up to us"; if he finds that the denial of this truth is a possible consequence of part of his philosophical position, then the philosophical position must be adapted or qualified to remove the potential contradiction.[41]

6. Conclusion

It is hard to give a clear, definitive, and satisfying account of the Epicureans' views on responsibility and freedom that is fully and explicitly integrated into their natural philosophy. We have only fragments of their position that show the effort they expended in considering the problem: a discussion of a form of atomic motion, an argument against the possibility of advancing a determinist argument, a view on the logic of future-tensed propositions, and some frustrating pieces of a detailed account of our psychological development. Nevertheless, it is clear that they were interested in these questions and that they did recognize the difficulties posed by their own preferred account of the basic constituents of all things. The Epicureans saw —as, at least on the Epicureans' view, the earlier atomists did not—that there is a problem to face in reconciling their preferred account of the basic constituents of the universe with the evident presence of self-aware agents responsible for some of what they do.

It is worth emphasizing, once again, that Epicurus was never in any doubt about the existence of genuine responsibility for at least some of our actions: a responsibility that licenses self-assessment and evaluation as well as second- or third-person criticism and praise. He is also convinced of the truth of the atomist account of the basic structure of things. Given that he is confident that these two claims are true, then he can also be confident that they are compatible.

Notes

1. See *Nat.* 25 and the text in Laursen 1997, 35. This section corresponds with LS 20C8, O'Keefe [A] 4, and Masi T8c.
2. On *prolêpseis*, see DL 10.31 and 10.33 with *Ep. Hdt.* 82. In this case, the preconception is justified by a constant introspective sense of our own agency. For further discussion, see Morel 2008 and 2014, Tsouna 2016, and Taylor, this volume.
3. See O'Keefe, this volume.
4. See Verde, this volume.
5. I say "may have" because "accident" (*tautomaton*) is printed as partially present in some editions (e.g., LS 20C13). But Laursen 1997: 42 prints "ταυτομεγ[.]ν" and rejects the vulgate "ταὐτόματον"; see his note on p. 72. I discuss this passage later in this chapter.
6. See, e.g., Aetius 1.25.4, Aristotle *Phys*. 2.4 195b36–196a3 and 196a11–16; compare: Simplicius *In Phys.* 330.14–20 and Themistius *In Phys.* 49.13–16. Cf. Taylor 1999: 188–95.
7. At *Ep. Men.* 134 Epicurus associates chance with what happens *ataktôs*, "without order." See also *Ep. Men.* 131 and *KD* 16: the wise Epicurean lives a life that is less subject to reversals of *tukhê*, "fortune."
8. It is likely that with the term "*phusikoi*" he has in mind a group that includes the earlier atomists, including Leucippus and Democritus.
9. Bobzien 2000: 288–93 argues persuasively that Epicurus's concern was not to ensure room for what might be called "two-

sided" or "indeterminist" freedom of decision or the will. That would be a response to a problem generated by the notion that an agent is free in this sense "only if they are undetermined (or not fully determined) *in their decision or choice* by external and internal factors alike" (Bobzien 2000, 290; original emphasis). Instead, Epicurus is concerned to show that some actions are dependent on the agent's overall present disposition, beliefs, character and so on. Cf. Bobzien 2006: 206–12.

10. On the relationship between Epicurus's work and Lucretius's poem, see Sedley 1998.

11. In fact, all atoms move at the same unimaginably fast speed since, despite differences in shape and size, they all are moving through a totally yielding void (Lucretius 2.142–64).

12. These *minima* (Greek *elachista*) are extended but part-less quantities. Epicurean atoms are physically indivisible but have parts; the smallest conceivable part is a *mimimum.* See *Ep. Hdt.* 56–9 and Lucretius 1.599–634 with Verde 2013. See also Algra, this volume.

13. Cicero *De Fato* 21–3, 46–8.

14. The best account of this section of the poem can be found in Fowler's 2002 commentary.

15. Compare: Cicero *De Fato* 20 where *libera voluntas* is threatened with being chained and fettered by fate. Bobzien 2000: 311 agrees that on this understanding *libera voluntas* is "pleonastic"; cf. O'Keefe 2005: 18–19.

16. Bobzien 2000: 309–10.

17. Most every account of Epicurus's philosophy will propose an interpretation of the swerve. In addition to the discussions in Bobzien 2000, O'Keefe 2005: 110–52; Masi 2006: 218–55; and Nemeth 2017: 133–65, see, for a variety of different interpretations, Furley 1967: 161–237; Kleve 1980; Saunders 1984; Englert 1987; Asmis 1990; Sharples 1991–3; Annas 1993; Purinton 1996; Purinton 1999; Fowler 2002: 407–27.

18. Cf. Cicero *De Fato* 22. At 2.216–50 Lucretius gives a second reason why atoms must swerve: otherwise, he says, all atoms would be moving in parallel courses downward and would never collide with one another. And if they never collide then
p. 160 they will never form kosmoi. But they do form kosmoi—we are living in one—so they must sometimes swerve. This ↳ argument is parallel in form to the discussion of *voluntas*; the swerve is a necessary condition for the formation of a world, and it is evident that worlds do form. For discussion, see Fowler 2002 *ad loc.*, O'Keefe 2005: 110–22.

19. There is a good introduction to the problems and recent interpretations in Masi 2006: 7–12 and 26–33. Multiple copies of *On Nature* were kept in the library at Herculaneum and various parts of three copies survive on different papyri (*PHerc.* 1191, 1420, 1056, 419, 697, and 1634). A full account of the papyrological remains and the history of the text, together with a new text, translation, and commentary can be found in Laursen 1995 and 1997; see also Masi 2006: 13–26. Some of the relevant texts were presented by LS as 20B and 20C, but Laursen's more recent text often differs. One of the difficulties in dealing with these texts is that there is no standard method of reference; Laursen prints editions of the various copies alongside one another with no combined numeration. There is a useful table of concordance at Masi 2006: 35. O'Keefe 2005: 165–7 also presents some of the passages, and he offers his own translations. There are further new translations into English of most of the relevant texts in Németh 2017 with yet another numbering of the various fragments; see Németh 2017: 201–2.

20. See Sedley 1988 and Algra, this volume.

21. See Kerferd 1971, Németh 2017: 92–8; cf. Gill 2007, Masi 2006: 64–73.

22. For a survey of previous interpretations, see Masi 2006: 53–6.

23. For an argument in favor of finding here an "emergent" theory of causally effective psychological powers, see Sedley 1983 and 1988. For discussions, which often range into Epicurean metaphysics more broadly, see Algra, this volume and Asmis 1990, esp. the useful remarks at 290–1; Fowler 2002: 428–43; O'Keefe 2005: 65–109.

24. See Lucretius 3.307–22 on how we may begin with certain psychological dispositions (timidity, calmness, and the like) but reason can train and alter these as we grow and change. He concludes (3.321–2): "So tiny are the traces of the natures left behind that reason cannot remove from us that there are no obstacles to us living a life worthy of the gods" (my translation). Bobzien 2006 offers a detailed discussion of the Epicurean account of cognitive and moral development.

25. Laursen 1997, 22, translated on p. 52; this section corresponds with LS 20B5–6, O'Keefe [C] 5–6 = Masi T7c.

26. The interest in this passage increased after the interpretation offered in Sedley 1983. For discussion and reaction see, for example, Purinton 1999; Bobzien 2000: 326–7 and 2006: 218–19; O'Keefe 2005: 93–106.

27. Laursen 1997: 32–3, translated on p. 53; this section corresponds with LS 20C1, O'Keefe [A] 1, Masi T8a.

28. The former stance is perhaps close to the Stoics' position. For an account of the Stoic view, see Meyer, this volume.

29. See, e.g., Diogenes of Oenoanda fr. 3.IV.3–12 Smith.

30. See Philodemus *On the Gods* Book 1 XXIV.20–34 Diels (*PHerc.* 26) and Diogenes of Oenoanda fragment 35.II.1–14 Smith. I discuss this further in Warren, 2020.

31. Bobzien 2000: 305, "As a matter of fact, all [Epicurus's] arguments *in this digression* [in *On Nature* 25] could be consistently proposed by a compatibilist determinist."

32. The relevant sections are presented in Laursen 1997: 35–40, with translations on pp. 53–4. This section of text corresponds with LS 20C2–7, O'Keefe [A] 2–5, and Masi T8c–d.

33. A similar formulation, *perikatô trepontes*, appears earlier in *On Nature* 25 (Laursen 1995: 92 = Masi T3). The Latin formula:
p. 161 *qui capite ipse sua in statuit vestigia sese* appears at Lucretius ↳ 4.72 as part of a similar argument against the thesis: "nothing is known." See Burnyeat 1978 and Castagnoli 2010, 145–59. Cf. Bobzien 2000: 300–1; Masi 2006: 73–6 and 106–57.

34. See Laursen 1997: 40–2 for the text and 54–5 for the translation. This section corresponds with LS 20C13–14, O'Keefe [A] 13–14, and Masi T8g.

35. See Gigante 1981: 50–62; Laks 1981; Sedley 1983; Laursen 1997: 70–1; O'Keefe 2005: 65–109; Masi 2006: 106–57 esp. 144–52.

36. For the Epicureans' approach to these questions, see Verde, this volume.

37. Cicero contrasts Democritean necessity with the Epicurean position at *De Fato* 23. Democritus also insisted that we are able to alter our beliefs and behavior so as to live happy lives; see Johnson 2014.

38. See also Cicero *De Fato* 21, 28; *Academica* 2.97; *De Natura Deorum* 1.70.

39. Compare Aristotle's discussion of the pair of propositions: "There will be a sea-battle tomorrow" and "There will not be a sea-battle tomorrow" in his *De Interpretatione* 9.

40. At *De Fato* 21, however, Cicero also admits that he would rather accept Epicurus's position than agree with Chrysippus that all events are caused by fate.

41. Carneades seems to have offered an account that preserves the logical rule (contra Epicurus) without consigning all events to being fated (contra Chrysippus) by distinguishing between those things which are made true by natural antecedent causes and those that are not (*De Fato* 19–20, 32–8). See Bobzien 1998: 59–86, esp. 75–86.

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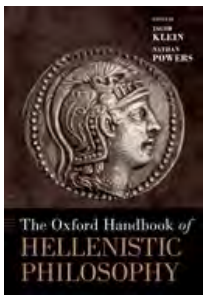
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CHAPTER

7 Epicurus on Living Blessedly

Phillip Mitsis Author Notes

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Abstract

This chapter develops an interpretation of Epicurus's hedonism in which the human goal (*telos*) is identified with the state of living blessedly (*to makariôs zên*) rather than with happiness (*eudaimonia*). This goal is attained through the satisfaction of desires directed at natural and necessary goods, whose priority for blessedness is not established by any direct experience of pleasure (as interpretations of Epicurean theory have sometimes proposed), but by rational reflection on what is naturally beneficial for human beings. On this account, living blessedly wholly consists in what Epicurus characterizes as katastematic pleasures, while kinetic pleasures are mere phenomenal variations of these, of no consequence to blessedness itself. Epicurus's hedonism thus has a more objective character than has sometimes been supposed, requiring rational reflection on human nature and the limits of desire-satisfaction, and differing markedly, in this respect, from the later hedonism of Bentham and Mill.

Keywords: pleasure, desire, motivation, agency, death, hedonism

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Evidence for Epicurus's account of what he calls "to live blessedly" (*to makariôs zên*) is scattered and comes mostly from sources that are desultory or hostile, but fortunately his *Letter to Menoeceus* survives.[1] Consisting of a few summary paragraphs, it provides our most connected and detailed discussion.[2] It might be helpful, therefore, to begin by looking at its argument not only as a point of reference for further scholarly reconstructions, but also to place Epicurus's conception of living blessedly within the context of his main ethical doctrines, at least to the extent that they appear in the letter.

1. A Typology of Desires

After exhorting his addressee, Menoeceus, to devote attention to his teachings, Epicurus opens with a few brief postulates about the divine and then turns to the question of death, declaring it nothing to us and that we have no reason to fear it. He then gives a passing nod to our ability to control our futures, something later examined in greater detail (*Men.* 133–5), and next abruptly sets out a rather schematic typology of desires that he links to living blessedly. One lively question is how much his theology, thanatology, and conception of agency hover over this typology and the ensuing discussion since explicit links are lacking. There are grounds for assuming connections, however, and these will be considered in due course. But first, Epicurus separates desires into two broad types. Some are *kenai* (empty, groundless, aimless) and others *phusikai* (natural). The first kind are
p. 164 presumably to be eliminated, while *phusikai* are further divided into the ↳ natural ones and the natural and necessary ones (cf. *KD* 29). He then draws a three-fold division among the natural and necessary: some are for *eudaimonia* (happiness), others for the well-being of the body, and some for life itself. One assumes that these are the desires crucial for living blessedly, though this is not explicitly stated. Setting out the division in this way apparently elicited Academic criticism (cf. *Fin.* 2.9) for mixing genera and species, and later Epicureans, probably in response, divided desires into the genera of non-natural and natural, and then the latter into those that are necessary and non-necessary (Philodemus, *De elect.* 6.7–21).[3]

Apart from formal considerations, however, several questions present themselves. We might wonder, for instance, why Epicurus begins this way.[4] Perhaps more striking is his claim that desires for *eudaimonia* are only one set among the others that aim at living blessedly. Anyone reading scholarship in ancient philosophy for the past half-century will have heard duly repeated the claim that all ancient philosophers, with the possible exception of some Cyrenaics, grounded their ethics on the basic principle that *eudaimonia* is the *telos* (goal, end), which serves as the comprehensive goal for all our actions. Here, though, Epicurus maintains that our goal is living blessedly and that its achievement depends on correctly understanding how to focus our desires on it, only one group of which, however, is *pros eudaimonian*. An uncharitable construal might be that Epicurus has gotten out over his skis through a kind of categorical overreach, but it is worth keeping track of what is usually passed over as a mere throwaway, perhaps because of the blinding light of Vlastos's "eudaemonist axiom."[5] Moreover—apart from distinguishing *eudaimonia* as just one element in living blessedly—as the argument proceeds, Epicurus explicitly identifies not *eudaimonia* but living *makariôs* among immortal goods as the *telos*.[6] *Eudaimonia* is not mentioned in the rest of the letter;[7] nor does it appear in the major collection known as the *Kuriai Doxai* or the *Letter to Herodotus* where again the term of art is *makariôs*.[8] Epicurus's few mentions of *eudaimonia* elsewhere refer to the perfect happiness of the gods.[9] In the rest of these texts, the *telos* of mortals is *to makariôs zên*, which linguistically recalls the earlier claim (*Men.* 123) that two properties characterize the divine—*aphtharsia* (immutability) and *makariotês* (blessedness)—the latter being regularly associated both with the ultimate goal of mortals and with Epicurus's view of his own attainment. *Eudaimonia* doubtless has a role to play, perhaps even the central role, but it is not the whole story or even the happy conclusion for one "living as a god among mortals" (*Men.* 135).[10] Nor, I think, is *to makariôs zên* merely a high-flown semantic substitute taking on the same *telic* role typically ascribed to *eudaimonia* in Greek ethics. To see this, however, we must continue with the argument of the letter.

Epicurus next moves from this typology to the claim that *aplanês* (fixed, unerring) *theôria* (contemplation, study) of desires (or perhaps of his distinctions among them)

> knows how to lead back every choice and avoidance to the health of the body and to the mind's absence of perturbation, since this is the goal of living blessedly; for we do everything for the sake of this, so that we might not suffer pain or be afraid.
>
> (*Men.* 128; all translations are my own)

The implication is that our choices and avoidances might wander from life's goal, but that *theôria*, which knows
p. 165 how to lead them back (*epanagein oiden*), does not.[11] Epicurus's ↳ expression "*aplanês theôria*" ("unerring contemplation") intimates further theological strains.[12] As Michael Erler argues, *theôria* has high Platonic overtones of contemplating the divine movements of the heavens, but is here brought down into the *bios praktikos* and identified with reflection about desire, thus effecting a transvaluation and the merging of the *bios theôrêtikos* with the *bios praktikos*.[13] Epicurean *theôria*, in effect, elevates us to the level of the divine as we reflect on and guide our earthly desires to our joyful blessedness.[14]

If we stop to take stock of the basic armature of the theory so far, we might initially conclude that Epicurus is offering a version of a desire-based theory of living blessedly. We have a range of desires and if we satisfy particular ones, we can achieve this goal. Such theories come in a variety of stripes, however, and we can begin by distinguishing Epicurus's account from what might be characterized as a *present desire* theory in which individuals aim to have their occurrent desires satisfied. To the extent that they manage this, they are, if not exactly blessed, at least fully satisfied. Such a view typically is attributed to the Cyrenaics, and there is evidence suggesting that Epicurus is concerned to mark off their views from his, though a common charge in antiquity was that he ultimately is unable to do so.[15] In this vein, Cicero remarks that Epicurus should be more precise in distinguishing between desires (*cupiditates*) and the needs of nature (*desideria naturae*; *Fin.* 2.9), since one can take Epicureans to be recommending that we satisfy *cupiditates* indiscriminately. At first, this might seem frivolous, given the thrust of Epicurus' typology, but Cicero is pointing to what he takes to be a linguistic advantage that Latin has in capturing not only a difference in the aims and structure of desires themselves, but also in their strength, since *cupiditates* are typically associated with extravagance, obsession, etc.[16] The verbal contrast between *kenai* and *phusikai* initially seems to speak to the grounds and aims of desires rather than, perhaps, to their motive force. But in an Epicurean context *kenai* is also meant to suggest, *pace* Cicero, a lack of inherent strength. If such desires have no intrinsic force, they are more readily eliminated, however powerful or obsessive they appear.

In any case, when Epicurus argues that we are meant to unerringly reflect on our desires, presumably the intended aim of such reflection is to ascertain how they fit together to achieve our goal of the health of the body and the mind's absence of perturbation. That is, we are to understand our desires not merely as transitory episodes, but as having a comprehensive and global contribution to make to our living blessedly. By the same token, one might, like Mill's pig, be satisfied with a limited or distorted view of the satisfactions of life. Thus, it seems that a further task of *aplanês theôria* is to ensure we are fully informed about our desires in light of other relevant possibilities. In contemporary jargon, Epicurus requires us to view our desires and their satisfaction in a way that is comprehensive, global, and informed.[17] But, importantly, he also ties them to "natural and necessary" elements in our nature.

2. Pleasure, Desire, and the Good

After setting out his typology, Epicurus turns next to the role of pleasure, but in a way that has led to conflicting
p. 166 interpretations. After claiming that we do everything not to ↳ suffer physical pain or to be afraid—the goal of living blessedly—he argues that "whenever this at once happens for us, every problem of the mind is solved, since a living creature (*zôion*) is not having to go off on foot (*badizein*) because of some lack and to search for another thing by which the good of the mind and the body might be filled up" (*Men. 128*).[18] With a somewhat jarring change of register between god-like reflection and the case of a living creature going off on foot for something it lacks, Epicurus here moves from questions about desires and their structure to "the good" of the mind and body.[19] It is at this point that he introduces the topic of pleasure and with an off-hand and rather mysterious *gar*: "because (*gar*) at that time we have need of pleasure, whenever from pleasure not being present we suffer pain." And he adds that this is why pleasure is said to be the *archê* and *telos* of living blessedly. To many, it has looked as if pleasure and living blessedly are being treated in this passage as identical—or perhaps inter-entailing—elements of the *telos*.[20] Following out to the letter all the required congruences, however, starts to become awkward, and such an identification has provoked conflicting responses.

If we suppose that Epicurus thinks that pleasure is identical to the good of the mind and body, we might initially conclude that he is a substantive hedonist. Our *telos* just consists of pleasure or the greatest balance of pleasure over pain. However, if the reason we pursue pleasure is that it fulfills our *telos* and achieves our good, a further question arises. Some scholars, for example, have argued that the value of pleasure is in the way that it restores the body and mind to their natural condition or "equilibrium."[21] Such a view, however, begins to drift away from hedonism per se toward a theory about the perfection of our natures.[22] It then becomes less clear that Epicurus is also an explanatory hedonist, in the following sense.[23] Pleasure does not serve an explanatory function in its own right if Epicurus's answer to the question "Why is pleasure good?" is "Because it is *sumplêrôtikê* and fulfills our natural or teleological good." Here it may be worthwhile to contrast Bentham, who is both a substantive and explanatory hedonist. For Bentham, we want our life to consist of the maximum of pleasure, but what explains why pleasure itself is good is that it feels a certain way that we enjoy, and we can measure that feeling by its intensity and duration. For Epicurus, one is hard-pressed to find explicit appeals to a corresponding feature of pleasure that explains its pursuit in its own right.[24] By the same token, as set out in the epitome of his theory provided in the *Letter to Menoeceus*, Epicurus appeals first to satisfying a list of desires that aim at necessary goods, then next moves to the general question of what fulfills or perfects our good, and then finally introduces pleasure. As a consequence, questions arise about how exactly Epicurus views the various potential relations, explanatory or otherwise, linking pleasure, desire, and the good. At times, for instance, he also seems to be offering what might be classified as an objective list theory of what makes for living blessedly, since he begins his account by suggesting that we are meant to choose from a specific inventory of desires whose satisfaction is objectively valuable for us.[25] We also are supposed to value such things as self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) and practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) as important goods, and when we live blessedly, we are said to be living among immortal goods (*Men.* 135), chief among them being friendship (*KD*
p. 167 27; *SV* 52, 78). In some ways, ↳ this kind of slippage between various strains of what goes into living blessedly is perhaps not surprising. If I have an informed desire for x that I have reflected upon and I see that it satisfies a natural and necessary desire, I can both gain pleasure by satisfying it and also include it among my inventory of objectives for fulfilling my *telos* of living blessedly. Accordingly, in one stroke, I am fulfilling my natural good, satisfying a desire, and gaining pleasure (cf. *Men.* 133). Questions remain about what goes on an Epicurean objective list since we are not given many details, but Epicurus often argues in a way that a Benthamite hedonist simply cannot. Bentham would ask how long and intense the pleasure is that I am intending to pursue, not whether it is the result of satisfying one of the approved desires on a list aimed at fulfilling elements of my natural good. Epicurus, by contrast, mandates at various times particular classes of pleasure or the satisfaction of particular desires, while also praising particular goods, abilities, values, kinds of knowledge, etc.

These elements of recent theories of well-being—pleasure, desire-satisfaction, and the objective goods of a perfectionist account—obviously can overlap, and my purpose in isolating relevant correspondences in Epicurus's arguments is not to anachronistically convict him of confusion, especially since many contemporary theorists find it both natural and necessary to move among these elements as well. Rather, I think it is useful to pick out important commitments in Epicurus's theory that get swept under the rug when it is assimilated to historical views more ready at hand. His theory is regularly viewed as a puzzling or ham-handed version of a standard utilitarian hedonist theory, though he is expounding an objectivist account of living blessedly of the sort hardly on the table for utilitarians.[26] It is debatable, of course, whether he can maintain a smooth compatibility among the various strains of his arguments. Yet, if we pause to reflect for a moment, we can at least see how his account, for instance, is not directly vulnerable to what is now widely taken to be a fatal objection to the hedonism espoused by Bentham and his successors.

Astonishingly, perhaps the main reason hedonism gets such short shrift among philosophers these days is because of a single thought experiment proposed by Robert Nozick about an "experience machine."[27] Once hooked up to such a machine, a subject's brain can be stimulated by scientists in order to induce pleasurable experiences that are indistinguishable to the subject from those that would be experienced off the machine: "you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book. All the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain … Would you plug in? What else can matter to us, other than how our lives feel from the inside?"[28] Nozick argues that hedonists must prefer a machine-life that will include more pleasurable experiences than our ordinary lives, which inevitably are also prey to painful experiences. The argument purports to show the inadequacy of hedonism to explain that we want to actually experience doing things as well as to satisfy our desires in reality rather than just believe we are satisfying them. We also want to be certain sorts of persons, not just passive entities hooked up to a machine. But the hedonist, Nozick claims, cannot account for these common intuitions about what we value in our lives.

p. 168 Epicurus, however, goes beyond Nozick's purely internalist conception of pleasure—a conception that treats pleasure as a mental attitude not requiring any relation to extra-mental reality—by spelling out objective features of our natures and an objective inventory of desires whose satisfaction supposes a life lived outside of any such machine. Epicurus thinks, for instance, that a blessed life requires not only self-sufficiency (a requirement which presumably unhooks one from the machine) but also rational control over one's actions and systematic knowledge about the nature of one's actual surroundings.[29] A central question, of course, is whether such features can be incorporated into an account of pleasure, but Nozick's thought experiment merely assumes a particular internalist mental view of pleasure that is surely open to dispute, and such anti-hedonist arguments, from at least the time of Plato's jellyfish pleasurably floating along without any need of scientists or machines, are hardly beyond the ken of hedonism's ancient defenders. An Epicurean hedonist may object in the first instance that Nozick's commonsense intuitions about our relation to the actual satisfactions of our desires and our conceptions of ourselves as self-sufficient persons are themselves justified by hedonism: that is, the reason I value self-sufficiency, for instance, is that it characterizes the kinds of pleasures that make for a blessed life. By the same token, the Epicureans hold an externalist conception of the mind in which sensations, images, etc. impinge on us from the outside, so that our mental experiences and the contents of our minds are partly determined by facts external to us. Thus, the notion of a Cartesian thinking thing on which Nozick's "experience machine" relies is not likely to move Epicurus, whose account of experience and of our further judgments based on it presupposes the reliable causal contact of our mind and senses with the external world.

3. Pleasure, Motivation, and Agency

Epicurus both describes the natural psychological/somatic motivation to pursue pleasure that we share with animals and also claims that the good of living blessedly depends on unerring, divine-like reflection and reasoning.[30] At first glance, we seem to be presented with two different sources of motivation that can be assessed along two potentially conflicting dimensions: their psychological strength and their rational authority.[31] In a passage at *DRN* 4.877 ff. that fills out *Men.* 128 in more detail, Lucretius gives a naturalistic account of the voluntary actions of animals and humans: images strike the mind, which then sets in motion *voluntas*, which in turn moves the body. As David Furley notes, this passage is compatible with a naturalistic causal story according to which the voluntary movements of living creatures are determined by the images they receive.[32] On the other hand, when Epicurus takes up the question of our responsibility for our actions (*Men.* 133–5), he distinguishes actions that are *par' hêmas* ("up to us") and *adespoton* ("free") from those that are determined or the result of chance. Free actions are integral to our living blessedly (*Men.* 135) and depend on
p. 169 ↳ practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and sober reasoning (*nêphôn logismos*). Epicurus is here keen to show that our rationality, upon which our freedom and responsibility depend, is incompatible with causal determinism, and he elsewhere argues that the canons of rational argument make any defense of determinism self-refuting (*On Nature* 34.26–30).[33]

Since Epicurus is also committed to a purely mechanical, naturalistic account of the development of our conceptions and rationality, we might wonder how reason is able to achieve the Archimedean leverage implied by his conception of rational action as *up to us*. Certainly Epicurus's appeal to a rather mysterious atomic swerve to guarantee the freedom of reason raised eyebrows in antiquity about the naturalistic credentials of his account.[34] Moreover, though pleasure clearly serves as a central motive for our actions, Epicurus is also prepared to treat intentional objects—such as the end of living blessedly—as motives, insofar as an accurate conception of these ends is required if we are to soberly evaluate and regulate the desires in whose satisfaction pleasure consists. In subsequent traditions of autonomist internalism leading to Kant, teleological motives of this kind are typically regarded as being distinct from causes, or at least from efficient causes; hence, we might be hesitant to view Epicurean agency as strictly naturalistic, since it seems plausible to suppose that reasons and motives in this broadly teleological sense are not causes of the sort amenable to investigation by the natural sciences. When coupled with Epicurus's further claim that free actions depend on agents being able to rationally elevate themselves above animals and children and to evaluate their desires along broadly ethical and prudential lines, the possibility of Epicurus's non-naturalism comes even more clearly to the fore.

Epicurus's appeal to these two different conceptions of motivation might therefore appear to create a deep fissure in his account of agency. On the one hand, his account of motivation based on the causal efficacy of pleasurable responses threatens to shatter agency into a mere theater of impulses in the manner of Hume. Motives of this kind, arising from the unreflective pursuit of pleasure, prompt actions of the sort shared with animals and children. On the other hand, Epicurus develops a metaethical account that appears to depend on a view of human rational agency according to which intentional actions, being the product of rational deliberation and judgment, are under the regulative control of the agent and derive from motives that have rational authority. This basic distinction between types or sources of motivation threatens to leave Epicurus with the potentially unpalatable result that when we are directly motivated by pleasurable experience, we are not engaged in a fully human action. By the same token, when we are motivated by rational principles and thereby engaged in fully human action, pleasurable responses may appear to have no role in motivating us. We may therefore appear doomed to fluctuate between two irreconcilable sources of motivation—an *archê* and a *telos*—that never make contact in their own right. This is one source, I think, of recent scholarly worries about whether Epicurus is a psychological or ethical hedonist, but saying that he is both does little more than merely canonize this motivational dilemma. To better understand possible Epicurean responses, we can turn to his next set of arguments.

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4. Pleasure as a Criterion

"For we understand that this (pleasure) is the first and congenital good, and that from it we begin every choice and avoidance, and return to it for a criterion (*hôs kanoni*) while judging (*krinontes*) every good by what we experience (*tôi pathei*)" (*Men*. 129).[35] In calling pleasure a *kanôn*, Epicurus appears to be invoking a particular image of a carpenter's rule that serves as a standard for the straightness of things, and hence in epistemological contexts, for instance, as a foundational basis from which to assess the truth of beliefs.[36] From Diogenes Laertius (10.31–2), we learn that Epicurus in his work *kanôn* included the *pathê* too as a criterion, and it seems fairly clear that the *pathê* have a foundational role in motivation that corresponds to that of *aisthêseis* in knowledge. In the way that our sensory experience serves as the criterion for our judgments about the world, the *pathê* serve as the foundation for judgments that motivate our choices and avoidances. One common way of reading this passage, however, has been to view it as referring to token occurrences of "feelings" that we are meant to use to judge "goodness" along some kind of introspective meter of commensurable and uniform mental states—in the manner, say, of certain characterizations of Bentham's hedonic calculus.

But just as Epicurus does not assume an epistemological procedure that draws inferences to truth from each sensation token, a corresponding picture presumably holds for the *pathê*. Suppose that my natural and necessary thirst is acting up and I need to slake it. I see a pitcher of water and a bottle of 1990 Montrose on the table, and as a good Epicurean I am prepared to use the criterion of pleasurable experience to make my choice. It cannot be the case that in order to choose which of the two conforms better to the requirements of my natural and necessary desire, I must take a sip of each, and that based on a comparison of these two pleasurable experience tokens (which only the most effete of sommeliers could possibly describe as "feelings"), I make my choice. Rather, as Gisela Striker argues, what it means to use *pathê* as a criterion is partially articulated at the end of the *Letter to Menoceus* (133), where Epicurus describes "the one having assessed (*epilelogismenou*) the *telos* of nature and having understood that the perfection of goods is easy to acquire and to fulfill." Just as perceptual judgments based on the criterion of sensory experience depend on a synoptic range of conceptual acquisitions and connections, so—as Striker argues—in the case of *pathê*, our judgments about pleasurable experience arise via reflective consideration of natural and necessary desires, of the conditions for their fulfillment, and of their relation to a state in which the body is free of pain and the mind free of fear—in a word, via consideration of "the facts of psychology and biology." Striker further suggests that " '*epilogismos*' … was simply the term Epicurus used for any kind of philosophical reasoning that does not take the form of deduction or inference from signs."[37] My judgment about the natural and necessary benefits of water versus Montrose arises from a wide assessment of the nature of this choice, one that is based on pleasurable experience but
p. 171 nonetheless shaped by concepts ↳ and judgments that are sifted by the synoptic reflection of "unerring contemplation" (*aplanês theôria*).

In sum, situational choices of this kind do not depend narrowly on token "feelings," nor on immediate inferences from them, but on a broader assessment of desires and pleasures structured by a rational conception of our end/goal.[38] Thus Epicurus's conception of the criterion partially closes, at least for adult rational agents, the motivational gap between our individual pleasurable responses and our end as an object of reason.[39] This may not resolve worries about the causal or naturalistic status of our teleological intentions and motives, but this result is unsurprising, since these worries depend on a wider issues within Epicurus's materialism that are themselves unresolved.

5. *Katastematic* and *Kinetic* Pleasures

So far, I have been speaking about "pleasure" in a general way in order to sketch some of the larger contours of Epicurus's views of the blessed life, as he himself does in his *Letter to Menoeceus*. But it is hard not to notice that his descriptions of the content of that life might occasionally seem somewhat tepid, for instance when we are told that we do everything so that we might not suffer pain or be afraid (*Men.* 127; cf. 128). This has led a long line of critics to wonder to what extent he is really talking about pleasure at all, and in order to see Epicurus's response we have to turn to the heart of his theory of pleasure, desire, and the good. Epicurus, I think, makes a distinctive and powerful innovation in thinking about pleasure by distinguishing between what he calls *katastematic* and *kinetic* pleasures and assigning them intimately connected but distinct roles in pursuit of the blessed life.[40] The former are correlated directly with the blessed life, while the latter are pleasures that can vary one's experiences in pleasant ways (*KD* 18 *poikilletai)*, but are not necessary for achieving the blessed life. This broad distinction cuts across both bodily and mental pleasures. Thus, taking, for example, my natural and necessary desire to satisfy my hunger, I might do so with brown bread or with white. Both satisfy my hunger; when either does, I reach a particular state of *katastematic* pleasure. While I am achieving that state by eating white bread, I may experience a distinct set of *kinetic* pleasures—pleasures tied to the texture of the bread, its smell, past associations, etc. The same holds for eating brown bread, and while both kinds of bread satisfy my desire and enable me to achieve a state of *katastematic* satisfaction and pleasure with respect to my hunger, the *kinetic* pleasures associated with these two respective experiences differ. From the perspective of my *katastematic* state, however, these individual *kinetic* differences are a matter of indifference (in a way reminiscent of the Stoics' promoted indifferents) since they merely "vary" the experience of pleasure I gain satisfying my hunger.[41]

There are also *katastematic* mental states, although they do not seem to smoothly map onto this model of desire-satisfaction. For instance, one important element of my *ataraxia* is my secure knowledge that my
p. 172 impending death is nothing to me. As I ↳ contemplate this, I may experience particular *kinetic* pleasures such as joy and cheerfulness (*chara* and *euphrosunê*, DL 10.136). These particular *kinetic* pleasures, however, are not crucial to my *katastematic* mental state because they do not add anything to boost it to its rational limit, which has already been achieved. Indeed, if *kinetic* pleasures played a necessary instrumental role in my *telos* in this way, weighing and pursuing them would soon become a prudential nightmare. Apart from the Millian objection that when faced with individual choices among *kinetic* pleasures, I would have to spend too much time, like a myopic accountant, trying to assess their relative value, overall planning for living blessedly would become even more of a prudential nightmare—rather like the case of a modern Brooklyn helicopter dad agonizing over whether allowing his five-year-old daughter chocolate rather than regular milk for breakfast will harm her chances for Yale (assuming both are fine from the *katastematic* viewpoint). As Iakovos Vasiliou argues, this does not mean that I have no reasons for preferring brown to white bread on a particular occasion, but whatever reasons I may have do not derive from a comprehensive mandate based on the state of blessedness that is my *telos*.[42] My mandate for living blessedly is a practical principle aimed only at my achieving *katastematic* states. Accordingly, though I must satisfy my hunger only in ways that are consonant with the rational limits of my natural and necessary desires for food, decisions such as the choice among breads depends on local reasons and preferences that are independent of the requirements of living blessedly. A sage eating white bread is no better or worse off than another eating brown, though their *kinetic* pleasures differ.

Epicurus's distinction between these two sorts of pleasures, though roundly condemned as confused, in fact neatly addresses several problems facing hedonists and non-hedonists alike. On the one hand, it defuses the charge that pursuing pleasure leads to a life of Cyrenaic sensualism and chaos, since sensualism depends on what Epicurus thinks is an incomplete and defective conception of pleasure. If we reflect on the fact that hunger has a natural and necessary limit set by the health of the body, we can take the necessary steps to

satisfy it. What this limit is can be discovered by a synoptic examination of what Striker describes as the psychological and biological facts. Once we understand those, we can then structure our desire for food in the light of its "rational limit": though we may enjoy various pleasurable *kinetic* experiences derived from this natural and necessary desire when satisfying it in various ways, the point is still to satisfy it at its rational limit. Questions of duration and intensity are not relevant, since it would make no sense in terms of my blessedness to ask, while eating a slice of bread, what the proper rational limit of intensity or duration of pleasure is. What Epicurus's distinction makes clear, then, is that a Cyrenaic or Benthamite conception of pleasure can easily become unhinged from the psychological and biological facts that structure a blessed life, according to Epicurus, and ground the natural limits of our desires and pleasures. Though Epicurus clearly recognizes that the satisfaction of desires gives rise to a variety of different *kinetic* pleasures, his focus remains on the central importance of their satisfaction within the constraints of our natures. Moreover, focusing on *katastematic* satisfaction makes individuals fearless in the face of chance (*Men.* 131) and gives them more control over their
p. 173 lives to the extent that one has more flexibility in satisfying a desire ↳ *simpliciter* than in satisfying it with an eye to achieving a particular *kinetic* pleasure. One can thus adapt one's desires to the circumstances, though, of course, within the larger constraints of our natural and necessary desires. An Epicurean who has perfected autarchy can occasionally enjoy a luxurious meal, but if only luxurious meals are available, it does not mean that the Epicurean should adapt accordingly if it is not conducive to health (*Men.* 130–1).

From the perspective of the Epicurean, then, common forms of hedonism make the mistake of artificially isolating *kinetic* from *katastematic* pleasure and focusing on the former. Accordingly, Cicero's criticism that we all know that "pleasure" just refers to *kinetic* pleasure misses the mark, since on further examination *kinetic* pleasures are not merely independently floating experiences. They are tied to structures of satisfaction which in turn can be rationally examined in light of their natural limits. Moreover, the corresponding objection that Epicurus mistakes a so-called neutral state of *katastematic* satisfaction for "real" pleasure, rests on a corresponding error.[43] The central Epicurean worry is not how it "feels," on some sliding introspective scale of pleasure, to have one's hunger satisfied. It is to be in the state of not being hungry. The process of satisfying my desire is indeed accompanied by particular *kinetic* experiences, but the point is not to achieve any particular experience of this kind, but to reach the proper limit of satisfaction. When I am in a *katastematic* state, I am likely to be experiencing *kinetic* pleasures as well, and unsurprisingly Epicurus mentions particular *kinetic* pleasures such as joy and cheerfulness (*chara* and *euphrosunê*, DL 10.136) that one may experience while in a state of tranquility (*ataraxia*). These *kinetic* pleasure are intimately linked with tranquility. So far from recommending the pleasures of a corpse, Epicurus recognizes the complex relations between pleasure, satisfaction, and the good of living beings.

6. Living Blessedly and Death

If we follow out the logic of Epicurus's claim that death in no way harms us, we seem to face a formidable hurdle. Why won't my blessedness be harmed if death cuts it short when it might have lasted longer? Those who think that Epicurus's claims about blessedness are compatible with his thanatology emphasize that, according to Epicurus, the blessed life is not improved by increasing its duration.[44] At least from the time of Cicero, however, this claim often has been met with incredulity, given that assessments of *eudaimonia* typically are assumed to require reference to the overall course of a life, which can be interrupted by death.[45] Thus, some scholars claim that we need to take his thanatology with a grain of salt, though it hardly needs pointing out that this latter approach cuts off at the knees the whole Epicurean project of freeing us from the fear of death. It should be remembered, however, that Epicurus thinks that the blessed life requires reaching a particular limit (*peras*) comprised of *katastematic* pleasures that are complete. Cicero and his modern followers make an objection to Epicurus's hedonism that is more at home against Sidgwick's view of pleasure which has no
p. 174 natural limit and ↳ increases with time, hence, can never be complete and is vulnerable to interruption by death.

Returning to the *Letter to Menoeceus,* immediately preceding his typology of desires, Epicurus claims:

> Hence a correct understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding unlimited time, but by having taken away the yearning for immortality.
>
> (*Men*. 124–5)

For Epicurus, a desire for immortality is both unnecessary and unnatural, and in *Letter to Menoeceus* 126, he offers a further analogy suggesting that the duration of a life is of no value in its own right: just as the wise do not go for the greatest amount of food, but the most pleasant, so in life we should aim to enjoy the fruits of the most pleasant time, not the longest.

As we have seen, Epicurus often seems closer to Aristotle than to a Cyrenaic when urging us to reflect on our desires as a whole in our aiming at blessedness. But the question of how similar Epicurus is to Aristotle on this question remains a matter of dispute. Certainly, one significant gap between them is that Epicurus thinks that blessedness is readily available to both the young and old, which suggests a large step away from Aristotle's structuring and evaluation of *eudaimonia* over the long term. Moreover, Epicurus claims that in the case of young people, we need not wait for the conclusion of their lives to make judgments about their blessedness. Indeed, Epicurus rejects the proverbial Solonian notion of looking to the end that Aristotle incorporates into his own account: "A voice that says look to the end of a long life is ungrateful for past goods" (*SV* 75).

At *KD* 19, moreover, Epicurus takes a further step: "Unlimited and limited time contain equal pleasure, if one measures the limits of it by means of reason." Beginning with Cicero, this claim has been treated as a straightforward denial of the relevance of duration in evaluating lives, and trying to make sense of it takes us to the heart of Epicurus's account and his claim that completeness in life means reaching a perfect limit (*KD* 21; cf. *KD* 20; *Pyth.* 116).[46] When Aristotle argues that completeness is necessary for *eudaimonia*, given that he treats completeness "which lacks nothing" as a maximal concept, it leads to an unrealistic utopian element in his account, since he believes that longevity makes a life better; but, of course, it is always (metaphysically) possible to live longer. Hence, a desire for this sort of completeness is perhaps not only utopian, but impossible.[47] By way of contrast, asking an Epicurean about the duration of a life of blessedness is on par with responding, when I aver that Josef Hofmann is a great pianist, "How long was he a great pianist?" In this, they are like the Stoics, since it makes no sense to wonder whether the life of a Stoic *sapiens* would be better if it lasted longer, since the duration of life is indifferent to a Stoic.

To see the force of Epicurus's claim here, let us take, on the one hand, the *katastematic* and *kinetic* pleasures
p. 175 gained by studying the *Letter to Menoeceus* in a way that enables ↳ one to grasp the rational understanding of blessedness set out there.[48] On the other hand, take my desires for smoking. No matter what the duration or intensity of the pleasure of smoking may be, Epicurus is committed to the superiority of the pleasures involved in rationally understanding the natural limits of life. We have seen how Epicurus grounds this claim in natural psychological and biological facts about our nature and the objective goods that perfect it. But can he hope to do so by appealing to the value of pleasure alone? One common objection is that, like Mill, he might seem to be ranking the pleasures of *ataraxia* higher on the basis of non-hedonic values. That is, in claiming that *katastematic* states involved in rational knowledge are superior to the pleasures of smoking, he appeals to some criterion of goodness other than pleasure itself. Moreover, Epicurus's view carries some strongly counterintuitive implications, such as that when I read a passage of the *Letter to Menoeceus* and take it to heart, this circumstance is more pleasant than all the "empty" heroin highs that have ever occurred in New York City. And my 20 seconds of reflecting on this outweighs all the hundreds of hours and intense pleasures experienced in those highs. Moreover, some of Epicurus's own claims invite a further worry: wouldn't reading that same wonderful passage over and over, notwithstanding its varying *kinetic* pleasures each time, eventually become tedious? The Epicureans offer a tedium argument against those who are leading un-Epicurean lives (*DRN* 3.940 ff.), but why don't the lives even of Epicurean gods and their pleasures become tedious, despite *kinetic* variation?

Here we face a quandary about the temporal differences between values and our experiences of those values. While knowledge might have a value that is timeless, my particular experience of that knowledge may not be so timeless.

I offer two observations, the first more historical. If we take Epicurus's *makarist* claims seriously, we can perhaps see, if only through a glass darkly, possible historical parallels. For instance, in the same way that, say, Teresa of Avila describes mystical experiences of only a few moments as more valuable than all other mundane moments of her life taken together, the achievement of Epicurean blessedness perhaps has a corresponding value for sages, outweighing pleasures of other kinds whatever its duration. To try to map such an ideal on to any notions of pleasure and lives that contemporary academic philosophers test with their intuitions is bound to fail, of course. It certainly failed for Cicero. Recalling that Solon held up the lives of Cleobis and Biton as exemplary, though they were prematurely cut short, we should perhaps view Epicurus's *makarist* claims as arising from within a broader spectrum of cultural intuitions about the way in which the fixed value of an achievement may trump considerations having to do with duration.

A more philosophical way forward, on the other hand, would be to explore more seriously the logical space between value and the experience of pleasure.[49] It is not enough, of course, just to proceed from a timeless value per se to pleasurable experiences of it, since this often is taken to depend merely on an illicit move from a value to pleasure, if the latter is taken to be non-evaluative property. Although we have been taught in first-year philosophy classes to quickly avert our eyes from Mill's arguments in this vein, Epicurus's theory perhaps provides more fertile ground for exploring such possibilities. First of all, Mill holds a subjectivist theory of
p. 176 mental pleasure in which incorporating ↳ evaluative properties such as "nobility" seems akin to mixing oil and water. Moreover, given that Mill treats pleasure as a feeling that arises separately from evaluative properties, his view seems vulnerable to the claim that those properties and not pleasure itself are the locus of the good. Epicurus, however, has a more complex theory of pleasure that is rooted in objective natural characteristics of the sort closed off to Mill. So, for instance, Epicurus identifies *katastematic* pleasure with health and with certain objectively valuable rational states of knowledge, and not as something that arises separately as do kinetic pleasures. Presumably, when I am healthy I am not enjoying some further separable state of mental feeling, but enjoying health in the sense of engaging in healthful pursuits, having my physical wants satisfied, and not needing to go off in search of something to fulfill a desire. The same holds for my ataraxia which is not some further separable state of uniform pleasant feeling.

Sages are engaged in mental activity and enjoy various understandings of the world that comprise their *ataraxia.* Such katastematic states are potentially more promising as a locus of value than accounts that take pleasure to be some further second-order non-evaluative intentional state focused on our first-order satisfactions. The latter merely move the problem of value back again and seem open to the objection that if the value of pleasures depends on the value of the objects we take pleasure in, pleasure cannot serve as a *telos*. By treating *katastematic* pleasures as the final goal, however, the Epicurean is in no worse a position than other *telic* theorists in being able to provide a range of valuable states and activities that can serve to ground a happy or indeed, in this case, a blessed life. Sorting out these particular questions, however, is not merely a matter of isolated theoretical conjecture limited to Epicurus's account of pleasure. More clarity about the relations of pleasure, desire, and the values of a blessed life is necessary before we can also begin to start solving some long-standing problems in his accounts of friendship, self-sufficiency, justice, the virtues, and the larger contours of his ethical theory generally. But in any case, Epicurus's account of blessedness is not easily dismissed with a few tired arguments against a form of hedonism he does not hold, nor is it so clear that his arguments against the harm of death falter badly, once his view of what it means to achieve blessedness is taken seriously.[50]

Notes

1. I use “living blessedly” as the *telos* for Epicurus, instead of the usual “happiness,” for reasons I hope become clear. Many nuances of Epicurus’s position are lost unless we entertain the notion that aspirations to divinity anchor his arguments. Cf. discussion in Piergiacomi 2013: 19–28 on how the *simulacra* of gods are interiorized by the wise in order for them to become like gods. See also Verde, this volume. After two thousand years of Christianity, the translation of *makarios* as “blessed” is liable to misinterpretation. In Epicurean usage, the term designates a state that does not depend on divine favor (perhaps another reason for Epicurus’s preferring *makarios* to *eudaimôn*) and places no premium on humility.

2. Emidio Spinelli 2012: 25–36 convincingly argues that Epicurus’s letter functions as a theoretically articulated epitome
p. 177 whose argument—carefully structured and linguistically ↳ exact—addresses multiple audiences, from beginners to those who have mastered the doctrines.

3. See Tsouna 2020: 164–7 for discussion of possible Platonic precedents for these distinctions and later Epicurean elaborations. Arenson 2019 discusses wider thematic parallels, bracketing claims about historical influence.

4. Cicero, through his character Lucius Torquatus, brings up the typology of desires as an afterthought in his exposition of Epicurus’s ethics and effaces the different aims of natural and necessary desires (*Fin.* 1.43). He also fails to indicate any substantive difference between natural desires on the one hand, and natural and necessary desires on the other, while making the entire typology depend on the ease of satisfaction, which cannot be the sole basis of their differentiation. For criticism of the claim that Epicurus’s ethical theory has an “inferential basis” founded on “pleasure” and “pain,” see note 37, and cf., e.g., *DRN* 6.24–5: “*et finem statuit cuppedinis atque timoris exposuitque bonum summum*.”

5. Vlastos 1991: 203. Vasiliou (2008) has brilliantly challenged Vlastos’s eudaimonist assumption for Socrates and Plato. I would like to register my debt to his forthcoming book (2025) which extends this argument to Hellenistic philosophy as well.

6. Apart from the exhortation, *kalôs zên* appears in *Men.* in oblique contexts or conjoined with *dikaiôs* and *phronimôs zên* and is characterized as inter-entailing with *hêdeôs zên*, which also occurs only at *Men.* 132 and is repeated at *KD* (= *VS*) 5. Neither appear elsewhere in the three *Letters*, *KD*, or *SV*.

7. The two instances of *eudaimonia* in the opening exhortation (*Men.* 122) are both paired with—and seemingly identified with—the health of the mind, which is only part of living blessedly. Though the exhortation concludes by saying that if one has such *eudaimonia*, one possesses everything, this is further clarified in terms of *makarism* at *Men.* 128. My own view is that the entire peritext (as in the two other Letters) might be later additions. Entire books about Epicurus’s *eudaimonism* are precariously perched on these two instances along with Cicero’s repackaging, e.g., Mitsis, 1988. But one must weigh these instances, which occur in an exhortation, against the evidence of Epicurus’s typology and exposition here and elsewhere. The latter support a *makarist* reading.

8. Which is not to say that later Epicureans, such as Diogenes of Oenoanda, do not use *eudaimonia* (cf. Masi 2017: 11–141). Given the fragmentary nature of the evidence, limitations of space prevent me from taking up the difficult question whether Diogenes’s account is compatible with Epicurus’s typology or diverges from it, perhaps because of later polemics with the Stoics or Cyrenaics.

9. Of other mentions of *eudaimonia* in Epicurean sources, two are from *On Nature* (book XII, fr. 27.1 and 179 Arrighetti = Phld. Piet. 10.265–70) and *On Piety* (fr. 19.1 Arrighetti = Phld. *Piet*. col. 12.350–64). These describe divinity respectively as *pantachothen eudaimôn* and as possessing *teleia eudaimonia*. Both adjectives indicate that gods possess *eudaimonia* in the highest degree, deriving from every source (*pantachothen*) and being perfect (*teleia*)—something not possible for mortals. Moreover, there is no association of *eudaimonia* with the *telos* in Epicurus’s *On Nature*. In book XXV, *eudaimonia* is associated only with the mind. On this point, see Laursen 1995: 46 = fr. 34.32 Arrighetti, and book XXVIII (fr. 13, col. 6 sup. of Sedley 1973: 5–83 = fr. 31.15 Arrighetti). Cf. Erbì 2020 for a fragment of the letter to Idomeneus that also does not connect *eudaimonia* with the *telos*. Finally, DL X 121a (= fr. 407 Usener) distinguishes two forms of *eudaimonia*: *tên te akrotatên, hoia esti peri ton theon, epitasin ouk echousan*; *kai tên kata tên prosthêken kai aphaieresin hêdonôn*. Human *eudaimonia* is not *teleia* and is not a blessed state in which mortals experience constant “joy” (cf. note 14).

p. 178 10. Piergiacomi 2013 and 2020. Cf. Konstan 2008: 128 ff. for a collection of texts and argument.

11. Philodemus gives an account of individual variations in the sources of our desires that might account for their straying in

this way. Cf. *De elect.* 6.5–20 with discussion of Tsouna 2020: 164–5.

12. For further links between *theôria* and being *makarios*, see *Hdt.* 78–80; at *Pyth.* 116, the contrast suggests that "*eis pantelê eudaimonian kektêmenon*" does not encompass the whole of the *telos*.

13. Erler 2012 suggests that Epicurus has Plato's conception of the contemplation of fixed astronomical objects in view (e.g., *Tim.* 34a, 40b). Cf. Epic. *Nat.* 14, col. 24, 1–9 = Leone Fr. 29.3 for *theôria* playing a therapeutic role in natural philosophy; also Lucretius's description of Epicurus at *DRN* 1.63–97 and Metrod. fr. 37 Körte = *GV* 10. "Remember that you, mortal by nature and with a limited life span, have risen to infinity and eternity through discussions about nature and can see the present, the future and the past" (transl. Inwood-Gerson).

14. Verde, this volume. As evinced in a letter by Epicurus to his mother preserved by Diogenes of Oenoanda (fr. 125 III.9–IV.10 Smith): "For not small [or ineffectual] are these gains for us which make our disposition god-like and show that not even our mortality makes us inferior to the imperishable and blessed nature; for when we are alive, we are as joyful as the gods" (trans. Smith 1993: 414).

15. Cf. DL 10.131–2; Diogenes of Oenoanda 2.3.7–14.

16. Torquatus's account of desire is strongly saturated with Roman social views and vocabulary, as in *Fin.* 1.43: *cupiditates enim sunt insatiabiles, quae non modo singulos homines, sed universas familias evertunt, totam etiam labefactant saepe rem publicam*. *DRN* 3.53 ff. similarly reflects Roman social vocabulary.

17. For discussion and terminology, see Fletcher 2016. Cf. §5 for Epicurus's particular understanding of the "comprehensiveness" of desires in relation to living blessedly.

18. Although Epicurus uses "*zôion makarion*" for the gods (*Men.* 123), presumably he is speaking here of human as opposed to non-human animals, the latter of which may go in search of pleasure, but not in search of *eudaimonia* or living blessedly. In Greek, animals are not said to be *eudaimôn* or *makarios* (except humorously in Aristophanes). John Cooper 1999: 487–90 moves from the arguable claim that this passage is restricted to "we Epicureans" to larger claims about Epicurus's "ethical hedonism" generally. See §3 for discussion. See also Verde, this volume.

19. I bracket difficulties surrounding the notion of "the good" of an agent. Such difficulties were famously raised by G. E. Moore and elaborated by Glassen 1957: 319–22. For a deflationary account, see Kraut 2011.

20. This is reiterated (but not clarified) later at *Men.* 131, when Epicurus says that what he means by pleasure as the goal is not the pleasures of the decadent or of sleep, but *to mête algein kata sôma mête tarattesthai kata psuchên*, i.e., living blessedly.

21. Gosling and Taylor 1982.

22. Hurka 1993.

23. See Crisp 2006b: 622–3.

24. At *Fin.* 1.37, Torquatus begins to explain *voluptas ipsa quae qualisque sit* but immediately turns to an example of the satisfaction of a natural and necessary desire, where the greatest pleasure is identified with the consequence of its satisfaction (*consecutionem affert voluptatis*); that is to say, the explanatory justification depends on the fact that the objects of natural and necessary desires are objectively valuable or good for us. Porter 2003 ↳ examines the evidence, but what seems to be missing (in my view) is any explicit statement of this particular explanatory claim. Indeed, *Fin* 1.30 suggests that one is not forthcoming. Bracketing questions of what is attributable to Cicero, there is too much room between *voluptas ipsa quae qualisque sit* and Torquatus's claim that *quam ob rem voluptas expetenda* is a matter of self-evident perception. The latter tells us that we perceive that pursuing pleasure is desirable with intuitionist immediacy, but it still does not get us to *qualis sit*—i.e., to whatever it is about pleasure that makes us want to pursue it. At best, this offers us a form of explanatory hedonism without an explanation.

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25. Cf. Gillham 2018. Scholars have long felt a tension in Epicureanism between pleasure and other deep Epicurean commitments—e.g., to friendship, to self-sufficiency, and to philosophy itself. Seeing Epicurus's theory as staging an internal debate between hedonism and an objective list theory raises many interesting questions that I cannot address here, since this would require examining key junctures at which Epicurus seems to value things in ways that go beyond

their pleasantness. Gillham's question reflects a central worry of contemporary theories of well-being and is thus both timely and promising for exploring some long-standing difficulties.

26. Cf. Long 2020. Mill and especially Sidgwick are concerned with Epicurus's account of the nature of pleasure, but they do not seriously consider how pleasure might relate to a natural *telos* or objective human goods and our "natural and necessary" desires. A utilitarian's concerns with aggregating mere preferences can make no special place for an Epicurean focus on objective natural needs and second-order preferences about them. This limitation to mere preferences has always been the bane of utilitarian social theory, since it cannot prioritize basic needs. By way of contrast, Epicurus's contractual theory of justice is rooted precisely in such needs and interests.

27. It is worth comparing *KD* 10, 11. Epicurus typically uses such counterfactuals to show their impossibility and lack of connection to the actual world.

28. Nozick 1974: 42 ff.

29. As a response to the "experience machine," Feldman 2002 defends a form of externalism he dubs "truth adjusted attitudinal hedonism" which usefully captures parameters of Epicurean claims about the role of knowledge in pleasure. Cf. Piergiacomi 2013 for externalism in ethical beliefs and the role of divine *simulacra*.

30. This section focuses on questions of motivation and agency in order to synthesize recent scholarly discussions of psychological hedonism, ethical hedonism, and the (unfortunately named, at least for Epicureanism) "cradle argument," on which see Mitsis and Piergacomi 2018: 109 ff.

31. See Cuneo 2011 for the distinction between motives as rational ends for the sake of which we act and motives as psychological states that impel us to act. I am indebted to his framing of the issues. For a discussion of parallel controversies between Stoics and skeptics about the roles of impulse and suspension in generating action, see Inwood 1985: 86 ff.

32. Furley 1967. Bobzien 2000 further claims that, as a result, Lucretius does not have a conception of free will. This is potentially misleading, however, since the Epicureans distinguish voluntary causal movements from the freedom of reason to direct *voluntas*, which is free to the extent that the rational person directing it is free, as Locke maintains.

33. How the macro and micro states involved in free action may be related in Epicureanism is beyond the scope of this discussion. The question has generated a large literature beginning notably with Diano 1939–42. Lucretius, our major source of evidence, is sometimes concerned to illustrate the great gulf between properties of the macro and atomic ↳ worlds, and sometimes implies direct similarities through suggestive questions, similes, and analogies. So far, no consensus has emerged about his considered view of the relation between individuals and their atoms.

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34. Lucretius says that the freedom of the mind, and presumably its reason, to direct our *voluntas* depends on the indeterminate *clinamen* of atoms (*DRN* 2.251–93). The question of how the Epicureans thought this works is unlikely to be solved, but in all fairness, most contemporary philosophers argue about freedom of the will independently of any claims about, say, quantum events or the nature of the physical world in general, and thus, for better or worse, have mostly given up the systematic ambition of providing a comprehensive and unified understanding of the cosmos that structure major Hellenistic philosophical systems. See also Warren, this volume.

35. A note on translation, since key words have a wide semantic range and scholars may draw different conclusions depending on their choice of translation: *krinontes* is from *krinein*, meaning both *to judge* and *to choose*. In the first instance, however, "*to pathos*" means "that which one experiences or suffers." It may also mean an "impression," "sensation," "what one feels," "affection," and "passion."

36. The classic discussion of this topic is by Striker 1977; and for Cicero's account of Epicurus's hedonism, see her 1993 discussion.

37. Striker 2020: 57. Cf. *KD* 20, 22; Schofield 1996. For a range of views, see Allen 2004 and Verde 2018. Sedley 1996 claims that pleasure and pain serve as an "inferential" basis for Epicurean ethics in the same way that atoms and void do for Epicurus's natural philosophy. But as Striker argues, no such inferential claims appear in *Men.*, nor do they in Sedley's main text, *Fin.* 1.29 ff., where instead Torquatus argues that the proper method of analyzing pleasure and its various roles begins with understanding the natural meanings of words (*quae vis subiecta sit vocibus*), hence with *prolepseis* and their relations. Cf. DL 10.31. For discussion, see Mitsis and Piergiacomi 2018: 109–18.

38. Though, to be sure, such token episodes of feeling do provide me with reliable contact with the world, as do all *pathê*, which, like sensation are "devoid of reason and suitable for receiving not one memory" (DL 10.31; cf. *Hdt.* 38, 82.5).

39. Emidio Spinelli suggests to me that the move from the *archê* to *telos* is a developmental one, perhaps in the manner of Stoic *oikeiôsis*. We begin as animals and can become like gods. This is an attractive view and points to another possible commonality with Stoicism. At *Men.* 132, though, *phronêsis* is called an *archê*, which will need finessing for this argument to go through.

40. *KD* 3, 10, 18–21; *SV* 33, 51, 59, 81; DL 10.136; For an overview of recent scholarly controversies, including those who deny that the distinction is Epicurus's, cf. Tsouna 2020: 153–63. Tsouna offers plausible arguments for its being his. Although this technical distinction does not make an appearance in the discussion, Vasiliou 2025, chapter 6 argues, to my mind correctly, that the *Letter to Menoeceus* relies on a *katastematic* conception of pleasure throughout, or else its arguments would not be compatible with the claims about death (*Men.* 124 ff) or limits (*Men.* 133).

41. LS 123–4 argue that *kinetic* pleasures play an important instrumental role in the *telos*. Their case rests, however, on the evidence of Cicero's discussions in the *Tusculans,* where Cicero tries to make the Epicurean distinction look ridiculous.

42. Vasiliou 2025, chapter 6 correctly points out that *kinetic* pleasures can be the objects of rational choice without being part of one's overall practical principle for pursuing the blessed life and fruitfully compares Epicurus's views with Stoic accounts of indifferents.

p. 181 43. It is often claimed that Epicurus denies that there is a "middle state of feeling" between pain and pleasure, which is meant to show how his view is counterintuitive. But Epicurus does not deny such a view in his own voice, since it is not relevant to his theory. Because he treats pleasure in terms of intensity and duration on a commensurable introspective scale, Cicero (seconded by Plutarch) views Epicurus's theory in this light. So, to be more precise, Epicurus's *theory* rejects a middle state of feeling in the sense that it is not relevant to the question whether a particular desire is satisfied of not. Moreover, Epicurus is not, as sometimes claimed, identifying such a postulated middle state of feeling with the rational limit of pleasure. Such a view also derives from Ciceronian misunderstanding or misrepresentation.

44. Cf. Rosenbaum 2020: 118–40.

45. *Fin*. 2.87 ff.

46. Cf. Miller 1976 for a convincing account of the relation of these claims about pleasure and death.

47. Brink 2022 offers an illuminating analysis of the tensions created in Aristotle's account by a maximalist view of completeness, and he outlines a more realistic conception that gauges success along a maximal scale.

48. Here I am adapting Roger Crisp's 2006a: 15 ff more Oxonian example of reading Jane Austen and drinking lemonade and some aspects of his earlier quasi-Millian defenses of the lexical ordering of pleasures.

49. For a recent attempt, see Voorhoeve 2018.

50. See Vasiliou's (2025) discussion of Epicurus's divergence from Plato and Aristotle in arguing that the rightness of virtuous action is ultimately grounded (metaphysically) in his conception of the *telos*. For discussion of Cicero's presentation of this feature of Epicurean virtue, see Robitzsch 2020.

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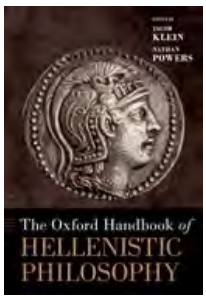
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CHAPTER

8 Achieving Tranquility: Epicurus on Living without Fear

Tim O'Keefe

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Abstract

This chapter considers Epicurean strategies for eliminating two of the most pervasive and damaging fears: fear of the gods and fear of death. Much of Epicurean philosophy centers on the elimination of empty fears, which are the main obstacle to tranquility in the Epicurean view. This chapter first gives a general taxonomy of types of fear, distinguishing the legitimate fears, which answer to "natural or necessary" desires, from the irrational and empty fears, which rest on false beliefs. It then reviews specific Epicurean arguments for the claims that death is not a harm and that the gods are removed from the workings of the world. The chapter concludes by distinguishing the role Epicurus assigns to practical wisdom in combating fear.

Keywords: fear, tranquility, Epicurus, therapy, desires, gods, death, wisdom

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1. Introduction: The Place of Eliminating Fear in Epicurean Ethics and Physics

Because of the Epicureans' idiosyncratic doctrines regarding pleasure, the project of eliminating fear is at the center of Epicurean ethics. The Epicureans are hedonists, maintaining that only pleasure is intrinsically good and only pain intrinsically bad (Cicero *Fin*. 1.29). They distinguish between bodily and mental pleasures and pains. Bodily pleasures and pains—such as those that accompany eating a bacon cheeseburger, suffering from hunger, or being struck in the face—concern the present state of one's body. But mental pleasures and pains—such as a thrill of excitement or a pang of regret—encompass the past and future too. For this reason, the Epicureans think that mental pleasures and pains are greater than bodily ones (Cicero *Fin*. 1.55–7). When people initially think of pleasure, they often have in mind some process of active titillation of the senses or of the mind, such as a pleasant sensation of eating a bacon cheeseburger or a thrill of excitement—which the Epicureans call *kinetic* pleasures. But the absence of pain, such as being free of hunger after having eaten the cheeseburger, is not merely a neutral state between pleasure and pain. Instead, it is itself a kind of pleasure—a *static* pleasure, as opposed to the kinetic pleasures (Cicero *Fin*. 1.37–8). Indeed, the Epicureans proclaim that the absence of pain marks the limit of pleasure, and that once this limit is reached, the pleasure one experiences cannot be increased (*KD* 3, *KD* 18).[1]

Given this pair of distinctions, the Epicureans maintain that the main constituent of the pleasant life, and hence, of the happy life, is the static mental pleasure of *ataraxia*, or tranquility—the state of being free from
p. 185 mental disturbance. So, while it is ↳ accurate to call the Epicureans hedonists, it might be less misleading to say that they are "tranquillists." Fear is the primary obstacle to achieving tranquility, and so Epicurean ethics centers on eliminating fear. (It also concerns itself with eliminating other sources of mental disturbance, such as regret and envy.)

In fact, it might rightly be said that *all* of Epicurean philosophy centers on eliminating fear. That is because Epicureanism is ruthlessly consistent in its hedonism, holding that everything we do—including philosophizing—is justified only to the extent that it contributes to a pleasant life. Epicurus says that philosophical arguments which do not drive out diseases of the mind—i.e., causes of mental disturbance—are empty and useless (Porphyry *To Marcella* 31). The two most pervasive and damaging fears are the fear of the gods and of death. But we cannot eliminate these fears without a correct understanding of the workings of the world. As Lucretius puts it, the terrifying darkness that envelops our mind will be dispelled not by the rays of the sun, but only by a systematic account of the principles of nature (*DRN* 1.146–8). So, Epicurean physics is subservient to Epicurean ethics, in the sense that the justification for engaging in the study of nature is that doing so is required in order to obtain tranquility. (It is not subservient in the sense that hedonic considerations are directly appealed to in their argumentation—e.g., fallaciously concluding that death is annihilation because it is comforting to believe that death is annihilation. The arguments for that conclusion proceed in the usual way.)

In this chapter, I will outline some of the main Epicurean arguments that are supposed to combat fear. I will start by giving a taxonomy of types of fear, and of types of therapy for fear. Then I will look at the fear of death and the fear of the gods, and discuss how theoretical wisdom (i.e., physics) helps to combat them. I will close with a consideration of how practical wisdom helps to combat fear.

2. Types of Fear, and Types of Therapy for Fear

Before considering how the Epicureans try to relieve us of fear, it will be useful to lay out some different types of fear, as different sorts of fear call for different sorts of therapies. Fear depends on believing that something bad will (or may) occur to you—for instance, if I am going to have a wisdom tooth extraction tomorrow, I may painfully anticipate the procedure, perhaps imagining the dentist tugging at the tooth as drool dribbles down the side of my face. But many fears are based on *false* beliefs concerning something that will (or may) occur to me. (This falsehood may consist in falsely believing that the event will occur, or in falsely believing that it will be bad for me if it occurs.) Such fears are harmful, and we may call them "empty" fears. This parallels Epicurus's own taxonomy of desires, in which he labels harmful desires based on false beliefs as "empty" (*Ep. Men.* 127; *KD* 29). Epicurus himself does not label some fears as empty, but the later Epicurean ↳ Philodemus makes a move similar to one proposed here, whereby he extends Epicurus's division of the desires to the emotions by labeling some types of anger as "empty."[2]

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Just as with the empty desires, such empty fears should be eliminated entirely, and the primary way of eliminating them is by uncovering and removing the false beliefs that are their cause. This sort of cognitive therapy may in turn be subdivided into two types, depending on the type of false belief in question. Some empty fears depend on a false belief about the nature of the world—e.g., about the afterlife or about the gods. To dispel these fears, we must gain theoretical wisdom—i.e., the sort of natural philosophy Lucretius extols—in order to show us that death is annihilation and that the gods have nothing to do with the workings of the world. Other empty fears are based on false practical beliefs. For instance, I may believe that a large amount of wealth is needed in order to live securely, which leads me to experience great fear when it looks as though the stock market might crash and wipe out my investments. In these cases, what I need is practical wisdom (*phronêsis*, sometimes translated "prudence") so that I know the limits of my desires and can figure out which ways of living actually lead to security.

Given that the limit of pleasure for the Epicureans is a state free of pain, we might think that the Epicureans aim to eliminate fear altogether. But this would be a mistake. According to Epicurus, the person who says that he fears death, not because it will be painful when it arrives but because it is painful when it is still to come, is a fool, because it is pointless to be pained by the expectation of something that will not be painful when it arrives (*Ep. Men.* 125). But to be pained by the expectation of something that would be painful (and hence bad) when it does arrive *is* fitting, and is not pointless. We may call such fears, based upon a correct belief that something bad will (or may) occur in the future, "natural and necessary" fears. Again, this parallels Epicurus's taxonomy of desires. He labels the desires for food, hydration, and shelter as natural and necessary—natural in the sense that they are congenital to humans and not acquired by enculturation and argumentation, and necessary in the sense that fulfilling them is necessary for happiness, or for freeing the body from troubles, or for life.[3] Likewise, the fears of hunger, disease, and the like are congenital to us, and we need such fears to avoid things that would cause us distress, bodily trouble, and death.

In the case of natural and necessary desires, we should not try to eliminate them, but to arrange our lives in order to fulfill them. Practical wisdom is what allows us to do so. What the Epicureans say about "natural wealth" helps illustrate their position and shed light on their analogous attitude toward "natural and necessary fears." Epicurus says that wealth as defined by "groundless opinion" stretches without limit (*KD* 15). Pursuing such wealth is misguided and counterproductive because it leads to anxiety. But the Epicureans do not reject the pursuit of wealth altogether, and they criticize the Cynics, who advocate heedlessly living in utter poverty so as to be carefree. The Epicurean Metrodorus writes that you should not avoid all things that involve difficulty and distress, because not having some of those things will cause more pain than the pain caused by striving to obtain them. One plausible example is health: basic dental hygiene involves bothersome effort, but it is worth it to avoid the agony of badly rotting teeth (Philodemus *De Oec.* 13.1–15).[4] And "natural wealth" is like health in this regard: ↳ obtaining the limited wealth needed to satisfy your basic needs involves some trouble,

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but far less than the pain you would experience by heedlessly disregarding wealth altogether. The wise Epicurean does have concern for his property and for the future (DL 10.120).

Likewise, the natural and necessary fears of things like hunger probably cannot be eliminated, and even if they could be, doing so would be a bad idea because of the important role such fears play in helping us avoid greater pains. Instead of *eliminating* these fears, we should *manage* them by intelligently arranging our lives so that we can face the future with confidence and they do not bother us much.[5]

Admitting that even the wise person will experience some fear comports with what the Epicureans say generally. We have bodies that are subject to hunger, thirst, disease, and other troubles. The Epicureans admit that such pains are bad, and that even the wise person will feel them (DL 10.119). (This distinguishes the Epicureans from the Stoics, who deny that such pains are bad, and likewise deny that the wise person suffers anything bad.)[6] And because of their bodily vulnerability, even wise humans are not entirely immune to some mental disturbance, such as fear of some future bodily pain. This theme is developed at greatest length by the Roman Epicurean Philodemus. Although the gods feel no anger as they have no weakness (*KD* 1), when a person is intentionally harmed by another, it is appropriate and natural to feel a painful "bite" of anger. These inevitable pains, says Philodemus, do not bar the wise person from achieving happiness.[7] In fact, the Epicureans think that having wisdom and the other virtues suffices for living pleasantly (*Ep. Men.* 132; *KD* 5) because the wise person has figured out that bad things have either a limited duration or a limited intensity (*Ep. Men.* 133). She has also trained herself to be able to think back on good times in the past with gratitude whenever she wishes to (Cicero *Fin.* 1.57). This allows her to get through painful times in the present while retaining her basic good cheer. This is shown by Epicurus's own example: recalling his past philosophical conversations allowed him to endure with equanimity his intense physical suffering as he was dying (DL 10.22). And while pangs of natural anger or fear are unpleasant, such temporary emotional "bites" do not fundamentally disturb the wise person's peace of mind.

So far, we have concentrated on *argumentative* modes of therapy for fear: arguments to eliminate the false theoretical or practical beliefs that cause empty fears, and arguments about the limits of human desire and the way to intelligently arrange your life so as to fulfill them, in order to teach someone how to manage natural and necessary fears. But the Epicureans also deploy non-argumentative therapeutic techniques; I will briefly discuss them below when talking about the fear of death.

3. The Fear of Death

Speaking of "the" fear of death is misleading, as there is a great variety of fears of death, and a corresponding
p. 188 variety of arguments the Epicureans deploy against them.[8] But ↳ the primary fear the Epicureans target is the fear that your death will be bad for you, and to combat this fear they deploy a primary argument, the "no subject of harm" argument, as follows. Death is annihilation. Therefore, death is bad for nobody: not for the living, because they have not died, and not for the dead, because they do not exist, and a person must exist in order for something to be bad for them (*Ep. Men.* 125, *DRN* 3.861–9).[9]

Theoretical wisdom is needed to secure the argument's first premise—i.e., that death *is* annihilation, so that we can infer that death is bad for nobody. If we did not know that death is annihilation, then we might have grounds to fear death: perhaps after death I enter an afterlife full of picturesque and inventive suffering or become reincarnated as a factory-farm-raised chicken in retribution for my consumption of chicken nuggets. This wisdom involves knowledge both of the fundamental principles of Epicurean physics and of the composition and functioning of the mind.

The body obviously ceases to live upon death, and so the Epicurean arguments try to establish that the *psuchê* is also mortal, as those who believe in an afterlife think of it in terms of the *psuchê* surviving death. The Greek

term *psuchê* (and its Latin equivalent, *animus*) has a wide range of meanings. It can sometimes appropriately be translated as "soul," for instance as used in the *Phaedo* to describe the immaterial seat of reason and personality. Aristotle says that every organism, including plants, has a *psuchê*, the form of a living body which structures its matter and makes it the particular kind of organism it is; here, *psuchê* is closer to something like "life principle." But for the Epicureans, the *psuchê*—at least in the case of humans—is what allows us to engage in activities like thinking, sensing, and making decisions, and so I will talk about the Epicurean arguments for the mortality of the mind, rather than of the soul.[10]

The Epicureans argue that the mind is something corporeal, specifically a bodily organ. Just as the heart is the bodily organ responsible for pumping blood through the body, so too the mind is the bodily organ responsible for sensation, thought, and memory (*Ep. Hdt.* 63). This is established by the causal interaction of the mind and the body (*DRN* 3.163–87). The body moves the mind, as shown especially in cases of sensation: a steel-toed boot drives into my kidney, and I feel great pain. And the mind likewise moves the body, as shown especially by actions: I decide to walk to the refrigerator, and lo! my legs move. However, only bodies can move and be moved by other bodies, and so the mind must be something bodily. Lucretius argues that this is true because all action and reaction must occur by contact, and that only bodies can touch and be touched (*DRN* 3.161–7).

The claim that only bodies can move and be moved by other bodies depends on the fundamental principles of Epicurean physics. The only two things that exist per se are bodies and void (*Ep. Hdt.* 39–40). The universe consists of extended bits of stuff moving through empty space, with all else that exists—colors, time, justice, enslavement, etc.—depending for their existence on the existence of bodies and void (*DRN* 1.445–82). And so, Epicurus says that the mind cannot be incorporeal, as philosophers like Plato maintain. That is because the only thing that is incorporeal is the void. But the void cannot do or suffer anything; it just allows bodies to pass through it (*Ep. Hdt.* 67).

If the mind is something corporeal, then it is mortal. This conditional claim also depends on fundamental principles of Epicurean physics. There are two types of bodies: compound bodies, which are made up of smaller bodies, and non-compound bodies, which cannot be broken down into smaller sub-units—that is, atoms (*Ep. Hdt.* 40–1). The mind is a compound body because it has accidental properties, such as being tired, which change over time. Atoms have a limited stock of properties, such as their size and shape, and they undergo change only in their location and relation to other atoms (*Ep. Hdt.* 54–5). And all compound bodies, such as the mind and our cosmos, are transient: they come into existence when atoms come together to form them, and they cease to exist when they disintegrate once more into jostling atoms (*DRN* 1.526–39).[11]

While this might establish that the mind is mortal, it is not sufficient to show that the mind ceases to exist upon death. The Stoics, for instance, think that the *psuchê* is something corporeal and mortal, but the Stoic Chrysippus also thinks that human *psuchai* survive the death of the body for some time, with the strong and coherent *psuchai* of virtuous people being especially long-lasting (DL 7.157). So, the general case for the mortality of the mind, based upon its being a compound body, has to be supplemented with more specific theorizing about its location and composition, such that it would disintegrate *upon death*. Epicureans think that the mind is a bodily organ located in the chest, as shown by the (supposed) fact that we experience emotions (such as a shrinking feeling when we are scared) in our chest (*DRN* 3.136–60). The atoms that make up the mind are especially small and smooth because thought is quick, and because the mind can be easily moved by images, which themselves are fine atomic films emitted from the surfaces of objects (*DRN* 3.238–45). On death, the "container" of the body cannot hold those atoms in as it did before, and the mind disintegrates, as the atoms making it up escape into the surrounding air (*DRN* 3.425–44). And so, those atoms no longer make up a mind. The mind can engage in "sensory motions" only when it is confined in the proper way in a living body, and death is the permanent dissolution of body and mind (*DRN* 3.548–79).

We can now turn to the ethical premises of the argument, concerning what is good or bad for somebody and the conditions for their being benefited or harmed. Does the Epicureans' argument presuppose their

hedonism? Some of the things Epicurus and Lucretius say to support these premises do presuppose hedonism. Epicurus asserts that all good and bad consist in sense experience (i.e., in experiences of pleasure and pain in particular), and thus that death, which is the deprivation of all sense experience, is neither good nor bad (*Ep. Men.* 124). Lucretius, when considering the objection that death is bad because it deprives a person of friends, family, and the other joys of life, responds that death also takes away the craving for these things, so that a person will not be bothered by this deprivation, and hence is not harmed by it (*DRN* 3.894–903).

So, it looks as though we could reject the Epicureans' argument by rejecting their hedonism. This is what Thomas Nagel does. He says that we care about things other than our conscious states of mind. For instance, I want my children really to love and respect me—not merely for me to have the pleasant belief that they do. Let us imagine that, unbeknownst to me, they betray and revile me. Since I am unaware of it, this betrayal ↳ may not bother me, but it still brings it about that I do not get what I want—and it is plausible to think that a person's interests are set back when their desires are not fulfilled.

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However, it is not so clear that the "no subject of harm" argument presupposes hedonism. Note that the presentation of the "no subject of harm" argument above makes no mention of pleasure; it simply asserts that death cannot be bad for a person who has died because that person does not exist, and that it cannot be bad for a living person because their death has not yet occurred. So, if death is annihilation, it looks as though the argument goes through no matter what your theory of human welfare is. If my children betray me after my death, this cannot harm me, as I do not exist to be harmed.[12]

But Nagel also faults the Epicureans for focusing on the intrinsic neutrality of the "state" of being dead. What makes death bad, he argues, is not that non-existence is intrinsically bad; rather, it is that death deprives us of goods we would otherwise have enjoyed, thereby making us worse off.[13] If we accept this counterfactual analysis of what makes death bad, then it looks as though a hedonist too could reject the Epicurean argument by considering the many pleasures a person would have enjoyed if they had not died.[14] (Of course, this makes death bad only if the continued life that the person would otherwise have lived would have been pleasant. For a person in end-stage cancer with untreatable pain, ceasing to exist might be beneficial for them.)

The Epicureans would say that this objection presupposes an "additive" model of goodness, that more time furnishes more benefits to a person, which death can then take away. Nagel, for instance, explicitly asserts that if life is something good, then more life is better.[15] But the Epicureans reject this model. The state of being free of all mental turmoil is the limit of mental pleasure, and the person who reaches that state has achieved the good. As Epicurus puts it, infinite time and finite time contain equal pleasure (*KD* 19), and once you obtain the things that remove the pain caused by desire, your whole life is complete (*KD* 21). Additional time does not increase the amount of pleasure one experiences any more than increased duration furnishes more "units of health" to one who has reached a state of bodily health.[16]

The "no subject of harm" argument addresses only the fear that my death will be bad for me. But what of my fear that my friends and family will die? Most people would feel terrible if their daughter died during open-heart surgery, and they might feel fear as their daughter enters the operating room. Lucretius addresses this fear by noting that, if the grief and fear are felt *on her behalf*—i.e., insofar as they are based on the thought that her death is bad *for her*—then it looks like the no subject of harm argument should apply to these feelings too. As Lucretius puts it (*DRN* 3.904–11), if death is not bad for the person who has died, and if the dead feel no pain whatsoever, then for us to feel great pain on behalf of the dead seems irrational.

But this still leaves open the possibility that the deaths of my friends and family will be bad *for me*, and so should be feared, and the Epicureans do not deny that this can sometimes be the case. In contrast to the Stoics, they say that entirely eliminating pain, tears, and lamentations at the deaths of friends would be a kind of bad insensitivity, and that experiencing these pains is worth it in order to seem tender and gain the benefits of friendship (Plutarch *Non posse* 1101a–b).[17] (While they do not state so explicitly, if ↳ the Epicureans admit that

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grief at the death of a friend is appropriate, it looks as though they must acknowledge a corresponding fear if I believe that my friend might soon die.) But, as with the "bites" of anger or other negative emotions that Philodemus discusses, the grief and fear a wise Epicurean would feel are compatible with her leading a tranquil life on the whole. Epicurus says that the memory of a dead friend is sweet (Plutarch *Non posse* 1105e): presumably the wise Epicurean focuses gratefully on the benefits that the friend provided when they were alive, rather than wallowing in grief over the present loss. Furthermore, the Epicurean model of friendship and its benefits is not centered on supposedly irreplaceable, one-on-one interaction with a unique friend, but on the entire network of friendships among the wise, who provide help and security to one another. So, if I am wise, while I might grieve at the departure of a friend, the absence of one person should not fundamentally upset the security of my life or my prospects for the future.[18]

One final fear that the "no subject of harm" argument does not address is the fear that my death will be bad for others: for instance, the worry that my family will find it hard to get by if I die in middle age. Philodemus's approach to this fear is similar to his approach to the fear that the death of others will be bad for me. He says that it is natural for the wise to feel a sting of pain at the thought that people close to them may suffer because of their death. But we can manage this fear through practical wisdom, by arranging things so that our death will not in fact leave them in dire straits (*On Death* 25.2–36). Epicurus himself provides an example of this: he carefully went to unusual lengths to preserve his will, depositing it and other documents relating to the school in the public archive of Athens.[19]

Such actions may seem inconsistent with the overall Epicurean position regarding death. The Epicureans maintain that all things that occur after I die are "nothing to me," that they cannot be good or bad for me, as I no longer exist. But taking great troubles now for the sake of shaping events that will occur after my death seems to presuppose that they do matter to me.[20] However, there is no inconsistency here. The Epicureans believe that friendship is an immortal good, one of the greatest means to attaining happiness, because good friends can be relied on to help you in times of need. But in order to secure the benefits of such a friendship, I must be willing to help out my friend in turn, caring for him as much as I care for myself. In fact, Epicurus says that the wise person is sometimes willing to die for his friend. So, while the future execution of the terms of my will cannot benefit me, my present actions of ensuring that in the future my will shall be faithfully executed can benefit me, as can other actions done for the sake of those close to me.[21]

All of the arguments we have been considering so far—at least those with the goal of eliminating some fear of death, and not merely managing it—have as their conclusion that death is not bad. And if we accept the Epicureans' further point that it is irrational to fear something that is not bad, these arguments also show that fear of death is irrational. But merely showing somebody that an emotion is irrational may not suffice to dispel that emotion, and if not, then the Epicurean arguments, even if they are cogent, might not be therapeutically
p. 192 effective. The Epicureans are optimistic about the power ↳ of reason, and of the sort of cognitive therapy they advance, to remove harmful beliefs, desires, and passions. But they are not naive. Although the "no subject of harm argument" may seem to show that death is bad for nobody and should be feared by nobody, the Epicureans do not imagine that the person who accepts its conclusion will immediately and entirely lose his fear that his death will be bad for him.

In what we have of his treatise *On Death*, Philodemus advances arguments, some of which we have discussed above, against a wide variety of fears of death. These include some very particular fears: for instance, that your enemies will gloat over your death or that you will die at sea. Sometimes, Philodemus simply applies the more general Epicurean arguments to the case at hand—e.g., observing that you will not exist after your death to be bothered by the gloating of your enemies. Other times, he dismisses the particular fear by noting that there is no rational basis for thinking this type of death is worse than any other. For instance, death at sea may seem particularly fearsome, but you can equally well drown in a bathtub, and having your body devoured by fish is no worse than by maggots and grubs. That Philodemus advances such particular arguments, and not merely all-purpose ones such as the "no subject of harm" argument, is significant. Even if a person is convinced that death

is not bad for him, he may still inconsistently hold, for instance, that death at sea in particular is bad, and Philodemus rightly shows a concern for eliminating all of these particular beliefs that fuel the fear of death. Lucretius adds to this the observation that some of the inconsistent beliefs may be subconscious. A person who is horrified by the thought of his body being torn apart by animals after his death may think that he believes that death is annihilation, but his horror shows that unconsciously he still has some unacknowledged belief that a part of him survives his death (*DRN* 3.870–93).

Philodemus and Lucretius also deploy non-argumentative modes of therapy to treat destructive emotions like fear. Philodemus says that sometimes imagery is more therapeutically effective than argumentation. A person overly prone to anger might not appreciate how badly off they are if somebody merely gives them an argument about the consequences of anger, but bringing those consequences before their eyes by vividly depicting them will make them eager to be treated.[22] Lucretius advances arguments against the Platonic and Pythagorean doctrine of the transmigration of the soul from life to life, but he also tries to discredit the theory by mocking it and making it seem silly. It is ridiculous, he says, to imagine innumerable immortal souls jostling one another around a pair of rutting animals in order to be the first one in when new life is conceived. Lucretius then then suggests that maybe they avoid this conflict by agreeing to a "first come, first served" policy (*DRN* 3.776–83). Lucretius also uses imagery to evoke emotions and thereby bolster argumentation. Lucretius believes that traditional Greek and Roman religion is one of the prime causes of fear and other evils in the world, and he wants to remove any allegiance his reader might have to such religion. But he does not merely give an argument that traditional religion is evil. Instead, he vividly depicts the sacrifice of Iphigenia by her father Agamemnon in order to appease the anger of Artemis, evoking pity for Iphigenia and indignation at Agamemnon (*DRN* 1.80–101).[23]

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4. The Fear of the Gods

Alongside death, the other main fear that the Epicureans want to treat is the fear of the gods. As with the fear of death, they try to prove that the fear of the gods is irrational by showing that the gods are not the cause of anything that is bad for us: in particular, by showing that the gods have nothing to do with the workings of the world and thus are the cause of nothing whatsoever. And as with showing that death is annihilation, showing that the gods have nothing to do with the workings of the world requires theoretical wisdom, appealing both to fundamental principles of Epicurean physics and to more specific observations.

The Epicureans exclude divine action as an explanation of what occurs in the world by excluding teleological explanations from their cosmology in general. As noted above, the Epicureans believe that the two fundamental constituents of the world are bodies and void, with compound bodies (such as you, me, and the cosmos) being composed of undividable atoms. Atoms move through the void because of their weight, past motions, the occasional minimal random "swerve" to the side, and their collisions, reboundings, and entanglements with other atoms. Everything else is a result of these atomic motions. Our cosmos—the particular world-system of earth, sun, moon, and planets—formed because there happened to be a great concentration of matter in one region of space. It started as a turbulent mass with different sorts of elements all mixed together. But over time they began to separate out, with like element starting to unite with like, as more massive elements, such as earth, settled down and extruded less massive elements, such as air (*DRN* 5.416–508).

Lucretius notes that these atoms did not get together and make an agreement about how to form the cosmos; individual atoms cannot think. Instead, they fortuitously happened to form it because of "blind" factors such as their weight and shape. And this exclusion of purpose also applies to meteorological phenomena within the cosmos, such as eclipses, lightning bolts, and earthquakes (*Ep. Hdt*. 76). Lightning occurs when clouds collide and strike out numerous "seeds" of fire, analogously to the way in which two stones or a stone and a chunk of

iron strike one another and make sparks (*DRN* 6.160–218). This sort of explanation is supposed to render unnecessary and displace explanations that appeal to the will of the gods, such as saying that lightning occurs because of the wrath of Zeus.

But to render this worldview acceptable, the Epicureans need to show how all of the particular workings of the world *can* be explained via the interaction of atoms, without divine intervention. In the case of cosmological and meteorological phenomena, such as eclipses, this leads to their doctrine of "multiple explanations." The Epicureans believe that we can be certain of the basic principles of atomism—e.g., that the world consists of bodies moving through void, with compound bodies composed of atoms—because only these principles are (supposedly) consistent with the phenomena we observe, such as seeing bodies in motion. But we do not have
p. 194 enough information from observation to ↳ infer the precise explanation of many phenomena, such as eclipses. So, in these cases the Epicureans are content to provide a disjunctive list of the possible atomic explanations of the phenomenon (*Ep. Pyth*. 92–115; *DRN* 5.592–770). That is good enough to show that the phenomenon *can* be explained via the interaction of atoms, without recourse to the gods. And because knowledge of the natural world has no intrinsic value, but is valuable only for the sake of obtaining peace of mind, trying to discover which of the possible explanations is the actual one would be pointless (*Ep. Hdt*. 79–80; *Ep. Pyth*. 85–8).[24]

The Epicureans also need to give non-teleological explanations for the way organisms are put together. The eye seems well-designed for the sake of seeing, providing valuable information to an animal, and teeth well-designed for biting and chewing, allowing an animal to obtain the nutrients it needs to stay alive. Philosophers like Plato and the Stoics took the apparent craftsman-like skill exhibited in the cunning organization of our bodily parts as evidence for the existence of a wise craftsman god. The Epicureans want to block any such inference. They also do not accept Aristotle's doctrine that organisms, although not the product of any sort of divine plan, nevertheless exhibit an intrinsic, natural teleology.[25]

The Epicureans admit that animal parts are useful for certain ends, but they deny that it follows that achieving those ends is their function or purpose (*DRN* 4.823–57). A hammer's function is to hammer things: somebody put it together for that purpose, and so the facts about its shape and material composition are a result of its function. But if I go camping and forget my hammer, I may pick up a flattened rock from a nearby stream to drive my tent stakes into the ground. The rock would happen to be useful for hammering, but it does not have hammering as its function: its shape and material composition are due to factors like erosion by the water, not to the fact that its shape and composition would help me set up my tent.

But it is not a coincidence that the organisms around today have bodily parts that are useful for the sake of survival and reproduction. In the past, there was a much wider variety of organisms around, but creatures with bodily setups less well suited for survival and reproduction died off in the competition with others. A creature with its heart located in an extremity would circulate its blood less well, and so it might be sluggish; creatures like us but without teeth would gum their food and so eventually starve to death; and so forth. Because of this process of natural selection, only the members of the fittest species are around nowadays. This is the result of the process of natural selection, but not its goal.[26]

The arguments above, in the Epicureans' general physics, cosmology, and biology, go a long way to make plausible a worldview where the gods play no role. Nonetheless, they are not enough to rule out the existence of gods we may have reason to fear. They rule out the existence of an immaterial craftsman god responsible for ordering the material world, such as the Demiurge described in Plato's *Timaeus*. But the *Timaeus* also states that the cosmos as a whole, and the heavenly bodies within the cosmos, are living and divine beings (Plato *Ti.* 30b). The Stoics, who are both materialists and pantheists, say the same thing (Plutarch *St. Rep.* 1052c–d).[27] Because the Epicureans admit that some compound bodies, like you, me, and other animals, are living and act for the
p. 195 sake of ↳ things, they need further arguments to establish that such cosmic deities do not exist, and that

nothing occurring in the world is due to their will. Likewise, the general principles of Epicurean physics on their own do not prove that there are not heavenly gods within the world; further argumentation is needed.

The argument against Platonic and Stoic cosmic and celestial deities is fairly straightforward. In order for something to be a god, it must have a mind. But clods of earth, balls of fire, and seas of water cannot have minds, because they are not even alive (*DRN* 5.110–45). Organisms must be composed of the right sorts of materials, organized in the right sort of way. Plato and the Stoics also think that a god is philanthropic, crafting the world for our benefit (Cicero *Nat D.* 2.133). The Epicureans, famously, are the first philosophers we know of to advance the problem of evil: the world is too flawed for it to have been created for our benefit, as shown by droughts, tornadoes, diseases, and animal attacks. Lucretius concludes his litany of the world's woes by saying that infants rightly cry out when they enter the world, considering the misfortunes that await them (*DRN* 5.195–227). But although the benevolent god of Plato and the Stoics is extremely powerful, unlike the God of traditional Judeo-Christian theology who is more often targeted by the problem of evil, he is not literally omnipotent. He is bound by the limitations of matter. Plato and the Stoics use this to explain away some of the evils in the world: for instance, Chrysippus, following the lead of Plato (*Tim*. 75 a–c), says that our skulls are as fragile as they are because if God had made them any thicker, we would be stupider (Gellius *NA* 7.1.1–13).[28] Nonetheless, Lucretius is rightly confident that the workings of the world show that it was not put together for our sake.

When it comes to traditional deities like Zeus—long-lived beings who are superhuman in power although subhuman (or perhaps merely human) in character—Lucretius focuses his attention on the thunderbolt, traditionally thought to be Zeus's weapon. When we look at where and when thunderbolts strike, the strikes form no intelligent pattern. They fall here and there for no purpose, striking both the innocent and the guilty, and sometimes even Zeus's own temples. Lucretius asks why Zeus would bother to hurl thunderbolts on uninhabited stretches of desert or the sea, suggesting sarcastically that maybe he does so for target practice (*DRN* 6.379–422). So, the way thunderbolts fall does not fit plausibly into any sort of divine plan at all, either for good or for ill, while it fits perfectly with the hypothesis that they are the result of blind forces operating in a universe that is indifferent to us.

In addition to these empirical arguments against the existence of meddling gods, the Epicureans also advance a conceptual argument. We have a basic grasp of what it is to be a god (the Epicureans call this sort of intellectual grasp a *prolêpsis*, or "preconception"), that a god is immortal and blessed (*Ep. Men.* 123–4; Cicero *Nat. D.* 1.45).[29] Feeling anger and giving trouble to others are signs of weakness inconsistent with blessedness (*KD* 1), so a vengeful being like Zeus cannot be a god. Less plausibly, the Epicureans criticize the Stoics' notion of god by saying that managing the world would be a real hassle (Cicero *Nat. D*. 1.52).

Initially, this conceptual argument seems to accomplish little. After all, a person could accept the Epicurean
 thesis about our preconception of the gods and still maintain that ↳ a being like Zeus exists simply by saying Zeus should be called a "schmod" rather than a "god." But being blessed is part of the popular Greek and Roman view of the gods, and so pointing out the ways in which other things they ascribe to the gods are inconsistent with blessedness may be dialectically effective in leading people to abandon these other views in order to uphold the gods' blessedness. Also, because they denied that the gods have anything to do with the workings of the world, the Epicureans were often charged with impiety. Using this argument, the Epicureans turn the tables and say that it is rather the many, who believe that the gods meddle with the world, who are impious, because they ascribe things to the gods that are unworthy of them (*Ep. Men.* 123–4). The Epicureans vehemently deny that they are atheists, insisting that they believe in gods conceived of as blessed beings, human in shape, who engage in no toil, suffer no trouble, rejoice in their own wisdom and virtue, and know that their lives will always be filled with supreme pleasure (Cicero *Nat. D.* 46–51).[30] We may reverently contemplate these gods and use them as models of blessedness to aspire to, but we need not curry their favor or fear their wrath.

5. Practical Wisdom and Living without Fear

In §2, I briefly discussed the way practical wisdom helps us manage fears such as the fear of being sick or hungry. In this section, I will expand a bit on how this process works, and close with a discussion of why practical and not just theoretical wisdom is needed to eliminate entirely the fear of death and the fear of the gods.

Practical wisdom teaches us the natural limits of our desires and how to arrange our life so that we can effectively fulfill our natural and necessary desires (*KD* 18–22, 29–30). Because of the tight connection between bodily and mental pleasures and pains in Epicurean moral psychology, almost every operation of practical wisdom serves a dual role, promoting both *aponia* (lack of bodily pain) and freedom from fear.[31] Mental pleasures and pains are greater than bodily ones, but they depend on them, in the sense that the memory or anticipation of bodily pleasures and pains causes mental pleasures and pains. When we exercise practical wisdom, this helps us realize future bodily benefits—e.g., obtaining the health that comes from living temperately and avoiding the bodily distress caused by gluttony. But more importantly, we gain the confidence that we will do well in the future, achieving what is good and avoiding what is bad, and thus realizing freedom from fear.[32]

Friendship provides a good example of how this works. If political power and fame are good for anything genuinely worthwhile, they are good for obtaining security from threats posed by other people (*KD* 6–7). But, as it turns out, they are not very effective means for gaining security; instead, they bring us into conflict with
p. 197 ↳ others. So, the wise Epicurean will not have the empty desires for fame and political power because he realizes that leading a quiet life and withdrawing from the masses are much more effective means to gaining safety (*KD* 14; *DRN* 5.1117–35). On the other hand, an utterly solitary life would be full of risks; we need friendship in order to be secure from danger (Cicero *Fin*. 1.65–6). In particular, though, it is not so much the continual help of our friends that we need; we require the confidence that they will help us whenever it is in fact needed (*SV* 34). As Epicurus puts it, the wise person wishes to have friends so that he might have somebody to attend him when he is sick and help him when he is imprisoned or impoverished (Seneca *Ep*. 9.8). If I am sick, and my friends come by to tend me, they promote my bodily well-being, which is a genuine good. But during the times when I am feeling fine, I also know that I can rely on my friends, and I thereby gain the much greater benefit of facing the future without fear.

The Epicureans believe that the fear of death and the fear of the gods are based on false beliefs about the nature of the world, and hence that we need natural science in order to dispel these fears and lead an untroubled life (*KD* 11–13). But such fears may also be caused by character flaws, which in turn are based on false ideas about what is good and bad. Lucretius depicts a personified Nature chastising an old man who fears death. His fear, she says, is caused by greed and ingratitude. According to Nature, he fears death because he always desires what is not there (*DRN* 3.957), and because he thinks that he has not had enough out of life. Since he thinks that his life is incomplete (*DRN* 3.958), he is fearful at the prospect that it will be taken away from him. According to Lucretius, many people are never satisfied with what they have. This causes a gaping thirst—that can never be quenched—for additional life, in order to secure what they do not yet have (*DRN* 3.1076–86).

The Epicureans would diagnose such people as exhibiting both an ethical and an intellectual failure. Ethically, they are greedy and ungrateful.[33] Intellectually, they subscribe to the sort of flawed "additive" model of goodness described above: no matter what goods they obtain, they suppose can always obtain more. As a result, their lives are never complete, and they view death as depriving them of some good they might have enjoyed. Nagel neatly encapsulates the idea: death is "an abrupt cancellation of indefinitely extensive possible goods." He thus concludes that "if there is no limit to the amount of life it would be good to have, then it may be that a bad end is in store for us all."[34]

Does Lucretius's rebuke of Nagel's Roman predecessor show that, for the Epicureans, it would be rational to fear death if the "additive model" of happiness were correct? That is, does Lucretius concede that if the additive model were correct, the person who dies would indeed lose something valuable, which would be bad for him? If so, he must also conclude that although such a person has a flawed model of goodness, his fear is at least rational given his mistaken beliefs.

I think that Lucretius does not concede this. If the "no subject of harm" argument succeeds, it shows that, even
p. 198 if the additive model is correct, death is not bad for the ↳ person who dies. Let us suppose that at the end of my workday I look forward to the pleasure of spending time with my children. But as I drive home, a traffic accident involving a tractor-trailer truck on the interstate ahead of me blocks all lanes of traffic, and I am unable to get home in good time. In such a case, Nagel would claim that the accident harms me by making me worse off, because I am deprived of the additional pleasure that I would have experienced had the accident not occurred. But if we change the scenario slightly, and instead the tractor-trailer truck plows into my Prius and instantly kills me on my commute home, things are completely different. I still do not get to experience the pleasure of time with my children, but this "deprivation" is not bad for me, because I do not exist to be harmed.

Instead, I think that Lucretius is making a more subtle point: when contemplating his death, the person who holds an "additive model" will think ahead to the goods he supposes he would have received had he continued to live, and he will regard himself as deprived of them, and thus he will fear death. In this way, he is analogous to the person who feels a shudder of horror as he pictures his corpse being savaged by animals. In both cases, in his imagination he falsely places himself where he will not be, and thus irrationally regards himself as harmed. So, the greed and ingratitude of the fellow who holds an additive model of goodness *causes* his fear of death, but it does not at all *justify* it, even conditionally.

The Epicureans make a similar point regarding the fear of the gods: that character flaws lead to this fear. Epicurus says that the greatest harms come from the gods to bad people and the greatest benefits to the good (*Ep. Men.* 124). This appears inconsistent with thinking that the gods have nothing to do with the workings of the world, so we have nothing to hope or fear from them. But what he means is that our *idea* of what the gods are like can benefit or harm us. The wise person who has a correct idea of the gods can reverently worship them and strive to model her own life on the life of the gods, thereby living as a god among humans (*Ep. Men.* 135). On the other hand, the fool who worships a vengeful god who demands blood and punishes those who disobey him can never be at peace. Note that Epicurus says *bad* people—not merely misguided ones—are harmed by their gods. Because the gods are paradigms of blessedness, our conception of them will reflect the ideals we aspire to, and what we find worthy of worship. So, reverence of a bloodthirsty and vengeful god will reflect a mistaken admiration for power and domination over others. Along similar lines, Lucretius says that the fanciful afterlife punishments that belong to superstitious religion are just a projection of torments people suffer here and now. For instance, while there is no literal Sisyphus pushing his boulder up the hill, politicians who ceaselessly thirst for public approval but repeatedly come away disappointed are like Sisyphus. (*DRN* 3.978–1023)

The upshot of this is that while theoretical wisdom can correct the mistaken views about the world that cause the fear of death and the fear of the gods, and thus show that these fears are groundless, it will not suffice to eliminate those fears entirely. Practical wisdom is the source of all of the other virtues (*Ep. Men.* 132), and so we also need practical wisdom in order to remove the character flaws on which such fears are based.[35]

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Notes

1. Mitsis, this volume.

2. For more on Philodemus's account of emotions, see Annas 1989.

3. Further consideration of what it means for something to be "natural" in Epicurean ethics is in O'Keefe 2020a.

4. The example is my own. For more on the topic of "natural wealth" and what the Epicurean Philodemus has to say on accumulating property, see O'Keefe 2016 and chapter 8 of Tsouna 2007: 163–94.

5. This distinction is originally proposed and further elaborated in Austin (2012), where she argues that the fear of violent death by others is natural and ineliminable.

6. Kamtekar, this volume.

7. This notion of "natural anger" is developed in *On Anger* col. 37–45. See Tsouna 2007: 44–51 for further discussion of "bites" generally; see Tsouna 2007: 195–238 and Annas 1989 for more on Philodemus's treatise *On Anger*.

8. For more on this variety of fears, see Warren 2004: 1–16. The entire book is an excellent discussion of the ancient Epicurean arguments about death and the modern discussions of death inspired by them.

9. Because of considerations of space, I leave aside the symmetry argument, a close cousin to the "no subject of harm" argument, presented in *DRN* 3.972–7. Briefly: a person terrified of eternal non-existence after his death should think back on the eternal non-existence that preceded his birth, which does not bother him at all, and realize that he has no more reason to fear his postmortem non-existence than to regret his prenatal non-existence. Warren 2001 argues that the "symmetry" argument is not really a distinct argument against the fear of death, but merely a vivid way of illustrating that non-existence is not harmful, in support of the "no subject of harm" argument.

10. Verde, this volume.

11. Algra, this volume.

12. To this point Nagel replies that death is bad for the person who *used to live*, because it renders their life as a whole worse than it would have been otherwise, and that this harm need not occur at any particular time. A good point of entry to the "timing puzzle"—i.e., the question of *when* the harm of death occurs—is Luper 2007, who defends "priorism," the view that a living person is harmed by his death prior to its occurrence.

13. Nagel 1979.

14. Feldman 1991 does so.

15. Nagel 1979: 2.

16. Rider 2014 explores further these different models of what makes a human life happy and the differences they make to assessing the badness of death. But even if we accept the Epicurean model, it looks like death could deprive somebody of pleasure—that is, when somebody progressing in wisdom dies before attaining it, and thus misses out on attaining Epicurean happiness. Philodemus considers this case in *On Death* 17.32–18.14 and concludes that it would be natural to feel a bite of pain under such circumstances. See Sanders 2011 for more on this topic.

17. Konstan 2013 explores the Epicurean conception of grief and argues that it is a natural and ineliminable emotion we share with other animals.

18. O'Connor 1989 explores in detail this aspect of Epicurean friendship.

19. Noted in Warren 2004: 163.

p. 200 20. Warren 2004: 162–99 advances this sort of argument.

21. While I believe that the case of wills poses no special problems for the Epicurean, there is a larger question whether what the Epicureans say about friendship is consistent with their egoistic hedonism in ethics. Annas (1993: 236–44) argues that they are inconsistent, and Evans 2004 that they are consistent. A recent paper on the topic, also arguing that they are consistent, is Rossi 2017. Cf. also Frede 2015. See also Asmis, this volume.

22. Philodemus *On Anger* 4.4–19. For more on this technique of "setting before the eyes," see Tsouna 2007: 204–9, and more generally on the treatise On Anger, 2007: 195–238. We do not have available to us an example of this technique applied to the fear of death, but there is no reason to think that it could not also be applied in this way (or was not).

23. For more on Lucretius's use of such techniques and how they comport with a commitment to rational argumentation, see O'Keefe 2020b.

24. Hankinson 2013 is a good exploration of the doctrine of multiple explanations and of possible differences in the doctrine as explained by Epicurus and Lucretius. See also Verde, this volume.

25. Perhaps the Epicureans believe that in order for something to exist for the sake of some goal, it must be the result of the intention of some agent; cf. Simplicius *in Phys*. 198b29. E.g., it does not make sense to say that teeth exist for the sake of cutting and grinding food, since nobody made them for that purpose.

26. This, of course, raises the question of where this earlier great variety of species came from: the Epicureans think that they were generated long ago by the earth when it was in a fertile period, with great heat and moisture. Lucretius appeals to the supposed generation of animals even now from muddy warm areas to render this idea plausible (*DRN* 5.772–825). For much more on Epicurean biology and the Epicurean doctrine of natural selection, see Campbell 2003.

27. Powers, this volume.

28. For more on how their arguments are supposed to work, see Bryan 2013.

29. Chapter 7 of Fine 2014: 226–56 carefully explains the Epicurean account of *prolêpseis*. See also Taylor, this volume.

30. The ontological status of the gods within Epicureanism is disputed. On the "idealist" view, they are merely thought-constructs or idealizations of human blessedness, whereas on the "realist" view, the gods are organisms like us, perhaps inhabiting the *intermundia*, or empty spaces between the worlds. Veres 2017 offers a useful overview of the texts and interpretations. A recent defense of idealism is Sedley 2011 and of realism is Konstan 2011. See also Verde, this volume.

31. I say *almost* every operation of practical wisdom, because some operations of practical wisdom are concerned with the past, not the future. In order to lead a pleasant life, I should rid myself of the pain of regret and seek the pleasure of gratitude, and I can train myself to recall sweet memories as a way to have pleasure always available to myself (Cicero *Fin*. 1.57).

32. Asmis, this volume.

33. See Rider 2019 for more on the role that gratitude plays within Epicurean ethics.

34. Nagel 1979: 10.

35. Some of the exposition of particular points in this chapter is adapted from O'Keefe 2006, 2010, and 2011.

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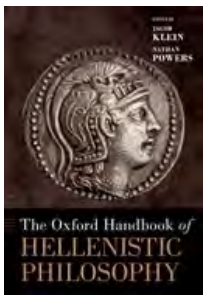
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CHAPTER

9 Living with Others: Epicureans on Justice and Pity

Elizabeth Asmis

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Abstract

This chapter addresses the question: Does Epicurus's theory of justice admit a concern for others for their sake? Epicurus famously held that justice, like the other virtues, is to be cultivated for the sake of one's own pleasure. Ancient and modern critics alike have wondered whether this doctrine leaves room for genuine other-regarding concern. This chapter will examine the question in two parts. Sections 1–3 will first present Epicurus's own account of justice. Sections 4–5 will then move on to Epicurus's Roman follower Lucretius, who included a history of human social development in his monumental poem *On the Nature of Things.* Both parts will also bring in Hermarchus, a close associate of Epicurus. As the first part seeks to show, Epicurus proposed a new conception of justice as a compact to secure a common benefit by not harming one another. This is a self-interested type of compact, which aims in the end at a personal sense of security as part of one's final goal, pleasure. It must be distinguished from the institution of laws, for which it serves as a norm for determining whether they are just or not. Lucretius offers a surprising role for a form of other-regarding concern—pity—in the earliest compacts made by humans. By adding pity for the weak to the compacts not to harm one another, he opens up the possibility of combining self-interest with a concern for others for their sake.

Keywords: Epicurus, justice, virtues, friendship, Hermarchus, Lucretius, pity, just compact

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Ancient opponents faulted the Epicureans for a supposed clash between theory and practice. Among them, Cicero objected that, though Epicureanism treats virtue as an instrumental means to pleasure, and though it advocates concern for others as a means to one's own well-being, Epicureans themselves occasionally did pursue virtue for its own sake, and help others for their sake, thus proving that "correct nature is more powerful than a crooked theory" (*Fin.* 2.58).[1] At a later period, the Stoic Epictetus cited Epicurus's notoriously

prolific writings as evidence of a disinterested concern for others, merely for their own sakes. If he really did want to eliminate the "natural community" (*phusikê koinônia*) of human beings, Epictetus asks, why did Epicurus toil over his lamp late at night, when it would have been to his advantage, and to that of his followers, to keep others unenlightened, ready to be shorn like sheep (*Diss.* 2.20.6 ff.)?

There is also, however, a question about Epicurean theory itself. Did it in fact hold that one ought to aim narrowly at one's own advantage, as Epictetus implies, or did it in some way combine self-interest with a concern for others for their sake? In the past, scholars have rightly focused on the Epicurean theory of friendship as the place to look for such other-regarding concern.[2] In this chapter, I will draw attention to a feature of the Epicurean theory of justice that we find only in Lucretius: the importance of pity (*misererier*, 5.1023) in the making of the first compacts among humans. Lucretius's treatment is very brief. It is remarkable, however, for two main reasons. One reason is its apparent softening, as scholars have long noted, of Epicurean self-interest.[3] Second is its novelty in the history of political theory: for the first time in a long tradition of philosophical thought, as I shall argue, Lucretius situates pity at the origin of justice. Given the sparsity of the evidence, it would be a stretch to see Lucretius, in his emphasis on pity, as a precursor of Rousseau or Schopenhauer. Still, there is enough evidence to show that Lucretius offers a promising way of integrating other-regarding concern with Epicurean self-interest. In this respect he foreshadows the importance others assigned to pity much later.

p. 204 The first part of this chapter (§1–§3) focuses on Epicurus's theory of justice, as presented primarily in his *Principal Doctrines* (31–38). Epicurus here proposes that justice consists in a compact, founded on self-interest, in which parties agree, to their mutual benefit, not to harm one another. The second part (§4–§5) then seeks to show how Lucretius introduces pity into Epicurus's conception of justice. Both parts also consider the reported views of Epicurus's associate Hermarchus on the origin of laws. As I shall argue, Lucretius fills out Epicurus's framework by drawing an explicit distinction between prelegal and legal forms of just compact. At the same time, he presents a new basis for Epicurean justice by combining pity with self-interest as the motivation for the first compacts. These differences are, in my view, compatible with what Epicurus is known to have said. What is strikingly new, on the other hand, is that Lucretius presents a model of justice that endorses a form of concern for others.

1. Epicurus on the Origin and Conception of Justice

Epicurus's theory of justice offers a new answer to a question that reaches back to the fifth century BCE: does justice exist by nature (*phusis*) or by convention (*nomos*)? Rejecting the disjunction, Epicurus combines nature and convention in the claim that "natural justice" is a certain compact (*sunthêkê*) not to harm or be harmed. How does he justify this claim? I address this question in this section by focusing on what Epicurus called the "preconception" (*prolêpsis*) of justice. This conception is set out in a distinctly coherent sequence of three *Principal Doctrines* (31–33, LS 22A). The first of these offers an immediate challenge to a long-standing tradition (31):

> The justice of nature (*to tês phuseôs dikaion*) is a token (*sumbolon*) of advantage (*sumpherontos*) in not harming one another or being harmed.

Epicurus here asserts that justice naturally secures the advantage of not being harmed in return for not harming others. As a "token," it is a guarantee, certified by multiple parties, to extend an advantage to others in return for the same advantage.[4]

In *Principal Doctrines* 32 and 33, Epicurus goes on to identify this guarantee as a "compact" (*sunthêkê*), while explaining how it came into being. Distinguishing human animals from others, he first imputes to certain

human “tribes” the ability and willingness to enter into compacts (*Doctrine* 32). He then identifies justice itself with such a compact (*Doctrine* 33). I quote *Principal Doctrine* 33 in full:

> Justice (*dikaiosunê*) was not something in itself; but in the dealings with one another in any places whatsoever [it was] a certain compact (*sunthêkê*) on behalf of not harming or being harmed.

p. 205 Like *Doctrine* 32, this text places the origin of justice in the past: justice was, and implicitly continues to be, a certain “compact” (*sunthêkê)* made at particular times and places. It is not, therefore, a criterion or standard that exists in itself (like a Platonic Form, or like the divine justice of traditional Greek religion) as something against which particular compacts must in turn be judged. Rather, the compacts themselves serve as the criterion of justice. Human beings decide for themselves, from one time and place to another, what is to their advantage in relation to others, and these decisions are constitutive of justice.

In *Principal Doctrine* 37 (LS 22B, as reiterated in 38), Epicurus uses the term “preconception” (*prolêpsis*; a term coined by himself) to designate his view of the “nature of justice.” Very briefly, Epicurus was said to identify a preconception as a true belief or general conception, consisting of a memory of frequent sensory appearances.[5] Displaying one or more salient features that are common to certain appearances, it constitutes an “outline” or “delineation” (*hupographê*) of such general features. What Epicurus says about justice in *Principal Doctrines* 31–33 fits these requirements. Together, these texts assign three salient features to justice: compact, mutual abstention from harm, and advantage. The preconception of justice may be stated, therefore, as follows: justice is a compact that guarantees the advantage that comes from not doing harm or being harmed by others.

This conception fits Epicurean ontology by assigning a contingent attribute to humans in relation to other humans.[6] As Epicurus explains in *Letter to Herodotus* (68–71, LS 7B), bodies exist independently as “natures in themselves.”[7] Their attributes, on the other hand, do not exist by themselves, but are dependent for their existence on the bodies to which they belong. The attributes are of two kinds: inseparable from the body to which they belong, or separable. The former make up the permanent “nature” of bodies; the latter are “contingent attributes” (*sumptômata*) belonging to a body for a limited time.[8] As examples of contingent attributes, Lucretius (1.455–8, LS 9C) cites slavery, poverty, wealth, war, freedom, and concord. Four of these attributes—slavery, war, freedom, concord—belong to humans in relation to other humans. Justice fits this group: it cannot exist by itself, but only as a contract and hence as an attribute; it is a contingent attribute of humans in relation to other humans.

After setting out the preconception of justice, Epicurus turns to injustice in *Principal Doctrines* 34–35 (see § 3), then follows up on the nature of justice in *Doctrine* 36 (LS 22B):

> As something that is common (*koinon*), justice [is] the same for all; for it was a certain advantage (*sumpheron*) in a community (*koinônia*) with one another. With respect to the particularity (*to idion*) of a place or of any cause whatsoever, it does not follow that justice is the same for all.

The text is carefully worded. Here again, Epicurus uses the past tense to point to the temporal origin of justice. As a certain type of compact, he now explains, justice confers a “common” advantage in “communal” relations but may differ depending on the particular circumstances of the community. There is a clear play on the term
p. 206 “common”: ↳ joined by a common attribute, humans become communal. There is, then, a sense in which Epicurus recognized humans as naturally communal. This naturalism is opposed to the Platonic–Peripatetic–Stoic position that humans are naturally communal from birth.[9] Instead, Epicurus holds, humans naturally become communal at a certain time and place by joining in a naturally just agreement not to harm one another.

This communality is tied directly to Epicurus’s conception of pleasure. Epicurus proposes both that the goal of life is pleasure and that the height of pleasure is freedom from pain.[10] In the case of the body, this is freedom from corporeal pain; in the case of the mind, it is *ataraxia,* freedom from distress or anxiety.[11] Freedom from

being harmed by others thus offers a means to the height of pleasure, the ultimate goal, by removing both corporeal and mental pain. I return to this point in §3.

Epicurus also rejects the extreme claim that humans are naturally aggressive from birth, seeking to take advantage of one another for their own benefit. This claim was defended by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* (483b–84a, 491a–92c) and reformulated by Glaucon in the *Republic* (358e–359b). In the words of Callicles, it is "the nature of justice" for the strong to get the better of the weak (*Gorgias* 483e). In time, Callicles maintains, the weak responded to the violence against them by compacting not to harm one another, thus constraining the strong not to take advantage of them; and this is just by "convention." By contrast, on Epicurus's view, humans are not naturally aggressive; for there is a natural limit to the goal of pleasure, and this goal is easy to obtain.[12] Since they are often misled by unnatural desires, this does not prevent humans from engaging in extremely vicious conflicts with one another (as Lucretius emphasizes). By nature, however, humans are cooperative, extending their individual pursuit of pleasure into a common pursuit, in which everyone pursues both his own advantage and that of others. In this extension, each person's own goal is primary, yet coincides with the goals of others.

To sum up: humans became naturally just, as well as communal, by entering into agreements not to harm one another. By nature, they are neither so self-seeking as to harm others for their own advantage, nor are they so unselfish as to benefit others except for their own benefit; instead, they cooperate with one another in pursuit of each person's own highest goal, freedom from pain.

2. Epicurus on the Justice of Laws

In this section, I consider two issues that arise from an examination of Epicurus's *Principal Doctrines* 37 and 38: the use of preconceptions as a means of confirming the justice of a compact, and the distinction between customs and laws.

Principal Doctrine 37 (LS 22B) will serve as my basic text; for *Doctrine* 38 is largely a rewording of *Doctrine* 37. Here is *Principal Doctrine* 37 in full:

> On the one hand, with respect to [conventions] that have been thought (*ta nomisthenta*) to be just,
p. 207 what is attested (*epimarturoumenon*) to be advantageous ↳ in the needs of [living in] a community *(koinônia)* with one another has the [property] of being just, whether it is the same for all or not.[13] On the other hand, if someone puts in place a legal convention/law (*nomon thêtai*), but it does not turn out (*apobainêi*) in accordance with the advantage of [living in] a community with one another, this no longer has the nature (*phusin*) of justice. Even if what is advantageous in respect to justice changes, but for a time fits the preconception, it was no less just during that time for those who do not confuse themselves with empty sounds but look to the facts.

Epicurus picks up the idea of sameness and difference, together with that of a community, from what he just said in *Principal Doctrine* 36 (quoted in the previous section). Building on these claims, he now issues a new demand: "[conventions] that have been thought to be just—literally, "what has been thought by convention (*ta nomisthenta*) to be just"—must be confirmed by reference to the preconception of justice in order to make sure that they really are communally advantageous. In other words, they must "fit the preconception" of justice (as repeated in *Principal Doctrine* 38). What Epicurus now singles out as decisively important in the preconception is the necessity of "communal advantage."

Epicurus draws on his own theory of verification to show how this advantage must be confirmed, if the agreement that secures it is to count as an instance of justice. Very briefly, a person uses a preconception both to formulate a belief and to determine whether the belief is true or false. A belief about justice concerns what is

perceptible; and in such cases, a belief is true if and only if confirmed directly by sense perception by a process called "witnessing" or "attestation," *epimarturêsis*.[14] Thus, whatever convention has been regarded as just receives confirmation that it really is just if and only if it is "attested" (*epimarturoumenon*) to be advantageous. Otherwise, it is not just. This stamp of approval, as it were, lasts only for as long as circumstances do not change in such a way as to eliminate the advantage secured by the agreement. Whenever there is no longer any advantage, what was formerly just is no longer just, though it was previously just. The wording is important: Epicurus does not say that in such a case the policy becomes unjust; it simply becomes "not just" (repeated twice in *Principal Doctrine* 38). In the case of policies that are no longer just, there is simply a lapse into a condition of being neither just nor unjust, as happened prior to the making of a just compact. The antiquity of a convention, it turns out, has no authority as such.

So much seems clear. What is not clear from either *Doctrine* 37 or 38 is whether or not Epicurus admitted the existence of justice, or just compacts, prior to the establishment of laws. In Greek usage, a social arrangement or convention (designated by *nomos* and cognate terms) can be of two kinds: it can be either (a) a custom or (b) a law in the sense of a statute.[15] This linguistic usage corresponds to a general belief in antiquity in the historical continuity of customs and laws.[16] In *Principal Doctrine* 37, Epicurus first uses the general term for "what was observed as a convention" (*ta nomisthenta*), a term that need not refer strictly to laws, then singles out an individual who "puts in place (*thêtai*) a *nomos*." This latter expression clearly refers to the act of law-
p. 208 giving, *nomothesia*, as ↳ practiced by a "law-giver" (*nomothetês*). Epicurus moreover implies that the act of law-giving—the creation of laws—is here at issue by his reference to "fellow citizens" (*sumpoliteuomenoi*) in *Doctrine* 38. The sequence of terms thus raises two questions: Did Epicurus recognize a continuum of compacts, consisting of both customs and laws? Or did he recognize no compacts of justice other than laws?

Epicurus's own overt references to law-giving, along with Porphyry's report about Hermarchus (who will be discussed next, as well as in section 5), have inclined scholars to suppose that Epicurus intended a strict identification of just compacts (*sunthêkai*) and laws (*nomoi*).[17] On the other hand, one might also note that Epicurus has a special reason for singling out laws for discussion. In particular, one might mistakenly identify laws (the acts of law-givers) with the judgments of an individual, such as Lycurgus or Solon, rather than with compacts made by the community. Epicurus avoids this misunderstanding by emphasizing that only laws receiving confirmation by the preconception of justice are in fact just compacts. In his view, the legitimacy of a law depends on neither the wisdom of a law-giver nor the power of those who enforce it, but rather on the communal advantage, as agreed upon by the community as a whole. This view leaves room for non-legal agreements such as customs to count as just compacts.

Hermarchus not only succeeded Epicurus as head of the Epicurean school but was also revered as a co-founder of Epicureanism whom it would be "parricide" to oppose, just like Epicurus.[18] One would expect him, therefore, to adhere especially faithfully to Epicurus's teachings while making contributions of his own. Hermarchus wrote on the origin of law, but all that remains of these writings is a rather lengthy report by Porphyry, a Neoplatonist of the third century, in his treatise *On Abstinence* (LS 22M). Although this report shows some influence of later thought, it is crammed with details that appear to reflect Hermarchus's own views.

According to Porphyry, Hermarchus drew a clear distinction between two stages in the development of society: a pre-legislative and a legislative stage. First was a stage of "irrational memory" (*alogos mnêmê*, 1.10.4) in which people "agreed" (*sugchôrêsantôn*, 1.8.1) on the utility of not killing one another but "often forgot" (1.8.2). Second is an act of *nomothesia*, the making of a law against killing one another (1.11.1). When some people came to recognize the utility of such a law by "calculation," called *epilogismos* (specifically, the calculation or assessment of sensory evidence), they induced certain others to make the same calculation and constrained the rest by the "punishment of law" (1.7.5–1.10).

Although Porphyry makes no explicit mention of either "compacts" or "justice" in describing these two stages, they are clearly present in the second stage where laws are made. But did they also exist in the first stage, prior

to the existence of laws? Porphyry's account distinguishes the later rationality (that is, "calculation") of law-making from "the irrational memory" and its frequent lapses in the first stage. Does this absence of rationality in the first stage preclude the "agreement" from being a full-fledged compact? I address this question later (in §4) in reference to Lucretius's first compacts. Considered on its own, Porphyry's report does not offer any
p. 209 positive evidence for the existence of ↳ prelegal compacts. Still, it seems to leave open, if only vaguely, the possibility of understanding prelegal agreements as compacts.

In sum, Epicurus holds that, as a contingent condition of human beings, justice both comes into and goes out of existence according to circumstances. What makes a particular requirement just is not any claim to universality, nor its antiquity, nor the authority of a law-giver or magistrate. What makes it just, as an agreement on what in particular is advantageous, is its actually being advantageous, and remaining so for as long as the agreement is in effect. Both Epicurus and Hermarchus treat laws as instances of justice; yet our evidence does not preclude the possibility that prelegal compacts too may fit Epicurus's account of justice.

3. Epicurus on Injustice and the Rewards of Justice

After delineating the preconception of justice in *Principal Doctrines* 31–33 (see §1), Epicurus turns immediately to explaining what is bad about injustice, thus leaving it to the reader to extract for herself both what is the preconception of injustice and what is good about justice. Here is *Principal Doctrine* 34 (LS 22A):

> Injustice (*adikia*) [is] not bad in itself, but in the fear of suspecting that one will not escape the notice of those in charge of being punishers (*kolastas*) of such things.

Principal Doctrine 35 (LS 22A) explains further what is bad about injustice:

> In the case of a person who does in secret something that they compacted (*sunethento*) [not to do] with one another with a view to not harming or being harmed, it is not possible to be confident that he will escape detection, even if he escapes notice a thousand times in the present. For up to the time of death it is unclear that he will escape notice.

On this view, what is bad about injustice is—notoriously—not injustice itself, but the consequent fear of being caught and punished. As *Principal Doctrine* 35 specifies, the perpetrator of injustice tries from the beginning to avoid punishment by acting in secret. The fear of punishment, moreover, is so deeply rooted that it lasts a lifetime; for a person can never be confident that he will escape detection.

What, then, is injustice? There is more to it, it appears, than merely to transgress a compact not to harm one another. The unjust person does not merely infringe an agreement, but also subverts it by acting in secret. Were he to infringe it openly, he would thereby partly comply with it by making himself subject to punishment,
p. 210 thus canceling out whatever private advantage he sought in infringing it. Instead, he seeks a double ↳ advantage: on top of preserving for himself the communal advantage of not being harmed by others, he seeks the private advantage of getting something for himself without paying the penalty. In short, he aims to take full advantage of others, exploiting them not merely by opposing them, but also by deceiving them. The catch, according to Epicurus, is that any resulting gain is always outweighed by the fear of being caught. The unjust person does not feel guilty about breaking a compact; he feels bad about the uncertainty of escaping detection —his consciousness of a prospective bad, as it were, taking the place of a bad conscience.

The preconception of injustice, therefore, may be stated as something like this: injustice is the subversion (by secret transgression) of the sort of compact that constitutes justice. This has the consequence, in turn, of causing a life-long fear of being caught and punished. This position has been much attacked, not only for its apparent immorality, but also for its implausibility. Is the criminal really haunted all his life by the fear of being

caught? Yet the Epicureans were adamant on this point.[19] At its basis, it appears, lies a new, in-depth psychology, according to which deep-seated fears and desires may cause us misery, even if we are not directly aware of them.[20] The fear of detection and punishment produced by injustice thus subverts what we most strive for—lack of distress—as Epicurus points out in *Principal Doctrine* 17 (LS 22B): "The just person is most free from distress (*ataraktotatos*), but the unjust person is full of the greatest distress."

The question of what is good about justice was much discussed by the Epicureans and their opponents. To understand Epicurus's own view, we need to turn once more to Epicurean ontology. As some scholars have suggested, it looks as though Epicurus is caught in an inconsistency between two conceptions of justice: a compact is ordinarily thought of as a state of affairs, or relationship, that exists outside the mind as an arrangement governing social relations; by contrast, the virtue of justice is a disposition of the mind itself.[21] Can these conceptions be reconciled?

As discussed in §1, Epicurus views a compact as a contingent property of human beings in relation to one other. This is a mental property, consisting in an attitude of agreement between each individual and every other individual in the community; and this attitude may or may not be lasting. If it is firmly established in the mind of an individual, it becomes the virtue of justice; if it is violated by an act of evasion, it is an act of injustice, and the aberrant attitude that prompts the injustice can instead become entrenched as a vice. It seems to me, therefore, that there is no inconsistency: the virtue of justice is an attitude of mutual agreement firmed up into a settled disposition. As a collective policy, a compact is indeed implemented externally as a common course of action that confers a common advantage. This course of action is not however the compact itself, but its outward expression or fulfillment.

There is, then, a kind of circle: an inner attitude produces an external advantage; and this results, in turn, in an inner feeling of freedom from distress. This sequence is supported by a wealth of evidence.[22] In general, what is good about a virtue is not the virtue itself, but its role as a means to the end of pleasure, which is good in itself. In Epicurus's words, virtue is "naturally linked" to pleasure (the verb is *sumphuein*, *Men.* 132, LS 21B) in such a
p. 211 way that neither can exist without the other. The virtue of justice, ↳ in particular, contributes to the goal of pleasure not only by particular acts of abstention from harm, but also by the peace of mind conferred by a lasting sense of safety from harm. The greatest benefit of justice, it turns out, is not the external advantage of not being harmed, but the inner freedom from distress. Epicurus says so himself: the "greatest fruit of justice" is "freedom from distress" (Usener 519).

In sum, injustice subverts justice in such a way as to afflict the perpetrators of injustice with a constant fear of punishment. Justice, by contrast, unites people in a relationship of shared advantages, the greatest of which is freedom from distress. Surprisingly (as it may seem), the goal of pleasure does not divide humans but unites them in a policy of cooperation. As depicted by both Epicurus and Hermarchus, this cooperation is neutral with respect to whether one has feelings of good will or not toward others; it only demands that one recognize that the gains of others are a means to one's own gain. Both of them, too, focus on law-making as the place where compacts occur, though our evidence on this point may be understood to leave open the possibility of prelegal compacts. As we shall see next, Lucretius embraces this possibility, while intriguingly founding the first human compacts on good will in the form of pity.

4. Lucretius on the First Compacts

As mentioned previously, Epicurus's followers generally revered him as an authority whom it would be "parricide" to oppose.[23] This did not prevent them, however, from elaborating and defending his doctrines with interpretations of their own. Lucretius was especially adamant about following in the very footsteps of Epicurus. At the same time, he clearly adapted Epicurus's doctrines to the needs of his Roman audience. Did Lucretius, then, look to Epicurus as his only source, or did he use other sources as well? The question has been much disputed.[24] Here, I consider Lucretius's sources only to the extent of trying to determine whether what he says about justice may reasonably be viewed as compatible with our evidence about what Epicurus said (considered in §1–§3). My main goal is to see how his presentation (no matter how much it owes to others) integrates pity with the self-interest that is essential to Epicurus's conception of justice.

In Book 5 of his poem *On the Nature of Things*, Lucretius offers a detailed explanation of the evolution of humans, including their social development. In sharp contrast with the point-for-point summary of justice in Epicurus's *Principal Doctrines*, Lucretius traces a gradual progression of changes, each emerging little by little from a previous stage. He distinguishes two main stages of human socialization. First, human beings emerged from their original, solitary way of life by uniting into families and making compacts with neighbors (5.1011–27, LS 22K). Second, they gathered into cities that were originally ruled by kings, then plunged into an abyss of violence, followed by the establishment of laws (5.1105–60).

This section focuses on the evolving role played by pity in the first of these stages. This stage consists of a
p. 212 succession of two kinds of social unit, one emerging from the other. ↳ The first is the family, which came into being when a man and woman joined to produce children that they recognized as theirs. Building huts, using fire, and fashioning animal skins, humans softened both physically, as a result of the use of fire, and in their relations with each other. These relations belong to the family as a reproductive unit: there is both a diminution of sexual violence and a breakdown of parental sternness. The latter came about as "children easily broke the pride (*superbiam*) of their parents with blandishments (*blanditiis*)" (5.1017–18).

This parental softening has all the hallmarks of a specifically Epicurean way of explaining parental love.[25] Instead of being inborn, it originates as a response to circumstances. Indeed, it is the sort of response that Epicurus assigned to the first stage of human learning as something that was "forced" upon human nature by the environment (*Her*. 75, LS 19A). It also fits the general Epicurean goal of pleasure. Children give pleasure to their parents, who relax their sternness in such a way as to give pleasure to them in turn. Lucretius presents this relationship as the first sentimental bond among humans. Consisting of a spontaneous sharing, it is not distinguishable as either narrowly self-interested or strictly other-interested. It is only at a later stage that it becomes subject to a hedonistic calculation, which determines whether or not it is in one's own interest.

From this description of family life, Lucretius proceeds immediately to the formation of the next type of community: a community of neighbors. I quote the much-cited passage in full (5.1019–27):

> At that time, too, neighbors both began to join in friendship, yearning not to harm or be treated with violence among themselves, and entrusted (*commendarunt*) their children and womenfolk [to one another], as they signified stammeringly (*balbe*) by vocal utterances and gesture that it is fair (*aequum*) for all to pity the weak. Nor could concord come to be in every way; but a good part (*bona magnaque pars*) preserved the compacts (*foedera*) chastely (*caste*); otherwise the human race would have been wholly destroyed already at that time nor could their offspring have perpetuated the generations up to now.

The passage is distinguished by a wealth of details, all of which have been discussed and disputed. What is noticeable, in the first place, is that it mentions all three features of Epicurus's preconception of justice, as discussed in §1: there are "compacts" (*foedera*, 5.1025, Greek *sunthêkai*), a term used again by Lucretius to

designate the first laws (5.1155); there is a verbatim translation of the prohibition against harming one another and being harmed (5.1020); and there is the advantage of being saved from extinction (5.1026–7). Second, these features are embedded in a context that is not attested elsewhere in our Epicurean sources or indeed anywhere else in ancient political thought. In sum, the first compacts are made by neighboring men joining in friendship with each other (5.1019); the men demand from each other pity for their children and wives; and they communicate "stammeringly" (5.1022) with each other that it is "fair" (*aequum*) to pity the weak.

p. 213 Do Lucretius's first compacts, then, truly mark the origin of justice, or do they still fall short in some way? Among the great diversity of scholarly interpretations, there is now something of a consensus that Lucretius's compacts do fit Epicurus's own account of compacts, if only loosely or imperfectly. As Phillip Mitsis has proposed, the compacts are "imperfectly grounded," since they are based on "sentiment and a sense of right" and are "not yet perfected by reason."[26] The appeal to pity, he suggests, introduces a standard that is "not strictly rational."[27] Similarly, Campbell claims that pity constitutes a "pre-existing standard of justice."[28] On the whole, there is an established consensus among scholars that throughout the cited passage Lucretius adheres broadly to Epicurus's own views but softens Epicurean self-interest by privileging sentiment over reason.[29]

These qualifications raise two main issues: the degree of rationality involved in Lucretius's first compacts, and the place of pity in them. As for rationality, early humans as depicted here are clearly still at a very early stage in the development of reason, as indicated by their rudimentary use of words, and some scholars have supposed that Lucretius means to present them as wholly inarticulate.[30] As shown by the adverb "stammeringly," however, together with the phrase "by vocal utterances (*vocibus*) and gesture," they are in fact beginning to shape their "voice" into articulate sounds. (The referent of *vox* can be either inarticulate or articulate.) As one might expect, they strain to make clear their incipient, "stammering" use of words by gestures. They also attempt to put together words into sentences, as exemplified by "it is fair (*aequum*) for all to have pity on the weak" (5.1023).[31]

Along with language, humans are also just beginning to form preconceptions, which precede the use of words, according to Epicurean theory.[32] Lucretius's use of the term *aequum*, which has attracted some scholarly attention, is revealing in this respect. It has a wide range of meanings, starting with the basic sense of "even," "even-handed," "fair," and extending to "right" or "just." Does it, then, point to some principle of moral rightness distinct from Epicurean "justice"? There is however a good reason (consistent with Epicurus's views) why Lucretius would have used *aequum* rather than *iustum* to designate the beginnings of what is just. Quite apart from the fact that the Latin *iustum* tends to connote legal justice (which has not yet emerged in this stage of Lucretius's account), the first compact-makers could not yet have had a preconception of justice; for a preconception is derived empirically from a number of prior instances of justice. Nothing prevents these first compact-makers, however, from already having a preconception of "fairness" in the sense of reciprocity, which is a key component of Epicurean justice.[33]

Further, Epicurus's theory does not suppose advanced powers of reasoning for the making of compacts. All it requires is the recognition of an advantage; and this is already well exemplified in family life by the ordinary means-end reasoning used to build huts, make fires, and prepare skins. Including a certain degree of conceptualization and linguistic communication, such ordinary reasoning is sufficient to enable humans to make compacts for their mutual advantage. Lucretius's text suggests, therefore, that humans have just reached the threshold of rationality at which they can make compacts with one another. Much remains to be developed; but the basic conditions have been met.

p. 214 How, then, does pity fit in? Does it take anything from the incipient rationality of the compact-makers by adding a prior sentiment? Let us look again at Lucretius's text. The neighboring men "both" began to become friends by agreeing not harm one another or be harmed "and" (*et … et*) entrusted their children and wives to each other on the ground that "it is fair for all to pity the weak." This may leave the suspicion that pity is a motive that is somehow additional to the demand not to harm or be harmed. This point does not, however,

follow. The grammatical conjunction ("both … and") reflects a conjunction of two social relationships: a relationship of friendship among the men agreeing not to harm one another; and a relationship of pity between "all" the men (5.1023) and the children and wives ("womenfolk," *muliebreque saeclum*, 5.1021) in the entire community.

As we saw in §1, every Epicurean compact consists of a generic agreement not to harm one another, together with some more specific content, depending on the circumstances. The only example we have, other than Lucretius's first compacts, is the example of a legal compact not to kill one another, as attributed to Hermarchus (§2). But there are obviously many other possibilities, such as not stealing property, not diverting the water supply, not contaminating the coinage, and so on. In each case, people agree (a) not to harm one another by (b) not harming one another in a specific respect. Lucretius's double formulation fits this pattern: the neighboring men agree, in general, (a) not to harm one another by agreeing, specifically, (b) not to harm one another's children and wives. Pity is not a separate motive, over and above the desire not to harm one another. Instead, it fills in a general concern, not to harm one another, with a specific concern not to harm one another in a certain way.

To bring out what is unique about this way of specifying the advantage of a compact, it will help to contrast it with another and more familiar story that Lucretius could have told—but does not. Right at the beginning of his description of family life, Lucretius mentions that human beings first began to use animal skins when they gathered into families (5.1011). Much later in his poem, Lucretius tells us more about this. The first skin vest, he points out, was an object of so much envy that the person who first wore it was killed in a bloody fight (5.1418–22). This stands out (though belatedly) as the first killing of one human being by another in Lucretius's narrative. What brought this about? When human beings first gathered into families, they acquired property—not much, but enough to provoke the envy of others and incite murder. Why, then, were the first compacts not intended to protect property and its owners? There was theft, and it cost lives. This double motive—self-protection and protection of property—has long dominated accounts of justice in the Western tradition. Why doesn't Lucretius adopt it too?

Let us look once more within the family. As previously suggested, Lucretius presents the pleasure parents and children take in one another as the first sentimental bond among humans. This bond, I now propose, is joined in time by another: the pity that arises, within a family, of the strong for the weak. Lucretius does not describe this development as a distinct stage within family life; yet is it clearly presupposed by the first compacts. From
p. 215 starting out as a reproductive union differentiated by reproductive ↳ function, the family comes to be differentiated as a union of the physically strong and the physically weak: the man is strong, and his children and child-bearing wife are weak. The weak are deficient in the ability to ward off harm; and the man has the strength to compensate for their weakness. It is reasonable to suppose that, under these circumstances, the man responds with a feeling of pity for his children and wife, and uses his greater strength to try to avert their suffering.

This then is the origin of pity, and of the first relationship between the strong and the weak in human society. Both the feeling of pity and the actions prompted by it are spontaneous, as is the response of parents to the "blandishments" of their children. Just as parents both take pleasure in their children and give them pleasure in turn, so the man feels an aversion to the suffering of his children and wife, and accordingly seeks to avert it. Likewise, too, familial pity cannot be distinguished either as strictly self-interested or other-interested; it is rather a spontaneous sharing that involves both forms of concern. This sharing is not a moral sentiment in the usual sense of a virtuous attitude. Instead, it fits the Epicurean goal of pleasure especially well: just as the family is united by pleasure, so it is united by an aversion to pain.

What, then, happens next? Settled within families, human beings continue to face violence from wild animals; but they are increasingly subject to violence from other humans as well. In view of this danger, and because they are increasingly rational, men come to recognize that they can better protect their wives and children not

simply through their own strength, but by joining in a compact with their neighbors. At this point, a "tribe" of men, as it were, has become both capable and willing (to use Epicurus's formulation at *Principal Doctrine* 32) to make compacts with one another. They have both a motive (the avoidance of harm) and the means to prevent it (the extension of pity to a community of neighbors). The result is a change in the evolution of pity. What was previously a spontaneous feeling directed toward one's immediate family is now extended, as a result of this agreement, to the children and wives within a community as a whole.

Remarkably, this is how men first seek to save themselves from harm by other men: not as individuals living a solitary life, nor as property owners, but as family men seeking to protect their families from harm. Lucretius's account of the first compacts thus fits Epicurus's view that one should save oneself from harm, but it adds a sentiment that goes beyond mere attachment to oneself and one's property: namely, an attachment to one's children and wife not as property but as "one's own" (as expressed by Greek *oikeioi*). What makes them one's own is not that they are useful in some way but that they are pitied and protected. This sentimental attachment has priority over a concern for oneself alone or a concern for property. By extending this attachment to others in the first compacts, Lucretius fills out Epicurus's conception of justice with a bond of good will toward others.

Lucretius thus assigns to pity a role that is unique in surviving ancient political theory, one that is likewise absent from a long subsequent tradition of political theory.[34] There is nothing extraordinary about it, on the other hand, if one looks toward its roots in ordinary life. It hardly needs saying that women and children were
p. 216 especially vulnerable ↳ to indiscriminate killing and enslavement in antiquity. Violence done to women and children, together with pity for them, was a prominent theme of ancient history and tragedy. In particular, the rape of women (notably Helen of Troy) was infamous in both Greek and Roman tradition as a first cause of war, spreading devastation far and wide. Lucretius's use of the term *caste* ("chastely" at 5.1025) hints at this tradition.

As the last step in its pre-political evolution, pity turned into a custom. While humans were still solitary, Lucretius tells us, they

> were not able to look toward the common good (*commune bonum*), nor did they know how to use any customs or laws (*moribus ... nec legibus*) among themselves.
>
> (5.958–9, LS 22J)

With the first compacts, humans became communal, in the sense in which Epicurus used the term *koinônia* (in *Principal Doctrines* 36 and 37, as discussed in §1–§2). They now look out for the "common good" by instituting the "custom" (*mos*) of taking pity on the community's children and wives. This custom differs from those one most commonly hears about: to worship gods, to abstain from homicide, to give hospitality to strangers. The range of customs does not, indeed, exclude pity. But Lucretius gives special prominence to pity for the weak by elevating it into the first custom.

This custom is sharply opposed to the Calliclean distinction (see §1) between the strong and the weak. On Callicles's view, whoever is strong among humans naturally takes advantage of the weak. Lucretius subverts this position by tracing the distinction between the strong and weak to the family, then extending the bond of pity that originated within the family to the first proper "community," a community of neighbors.[35]

I have said very little so far about friendship (*amicities*, 5.1019). Lucretius emphasizes it as the first thing he mentions about the making of compacts; he then joins it to pity as one of two kinds of feeling that unite the first community. This is another feature distinct to Lucretius's narrative; nowhere else in our sources is friendship linked with the first compacts. As with pity, however, this link is both consistent with Epicurean theory and adds a positive concern for others.[36] As Epicurus said, friendship is useful as a means of providing security (*Principal Doctrine* 28, LS 22E, cf. *Vatican Saying* 34, LS22F) and indeed contributes "by far the most" toward the happiness of one's life (*Principal Doctrine* 27, LS 22E). Epicurus also reportedly said that friendship

"began with utility (*ôpheleia*)" (*Vatican Saying* 23, LS 22F); and some of his followers went so far as to propose that it develops, out of familiarity, into a concern for a friend for his own sake.[37]

Given this innovation, one might ask whether some Epicureans might also have viewed pity for the weak as developing into a disinterested concern for others. We have no evidence on this question. Considering, too, the difference between the intimacy of friendship and the far-reaching scope of pity, it seems unlikely that anyone took this step. On the other hand, it appears that one thing that pity, as an aversion to the pain of others, has in common with friendship is the goal of sharing pleasure with another.[38] In the case of pity, the strong share
p. 217 pleasure with the weak by averting their pain; in ↳ friendship, persons share pleasure as equals. Lucretius links friendship to pity in the first compacts by combining the two kinds of pleasure with each other.

In sum, Lucretius identifies the beginning of justice as the making of compacts by the strong within the community (the men in each family) not to harm one another by agreeing to take pity on the weak in the community (their children and wives). In his emphasis on both friendship and pity in the origins of justice, Lucretius adds a positive concern for the well-being of others, a concern which is missing from our evidence about Epicurus's compacts.

5. From Pity to the Making of Laws

The next step in Lucretius's account of the growth of communities is the foundation of cities, ruled by kings. It goes along with a new type of distinction among humans: some stood out in "intellect and courage," and they taught the rest to change their lives (5.1105–7, LS 22L). Kings were among these gifted individuals, building citadels for their own protection and distributing cattle and fields to the rest on the basis of beauty, strength, and intellect (5.1111, LS 22L). In time, the rule of kings was subverted by the discovery of gold. The ensuing struggle for wealth and power descended into an abyss of violence—a war of everyone against everyone—as each man sought supreme power for himself (5.1113–42, LS 22L). In the end, humans came to be weary of the violence, at which point certain individuals again took the lead by teaching others to institute and appoint magistrates. Lucretius concludes by observing that, in place of a fear of violence, people were now filled with a fear of punishment.

Lucretius's entire narrative of social development is framed by just two occurrences of the term *foedera*, "compacts": the first "compacts" (5.1025), resulting in much "concord" (5.1024); and the institution of laws as "compacts of peace" (5.1155), clearly signaling an end to war. The two references mark two end points: at one end, the first compacts support one another's goals through a sharing of pity by friends; at the other end, the first legal compacts prevent interference with one's goals by restraining each person's hostility toward one another. What Lucretius adds in each case is a feeling toward others: this is a positive feeling of sociability in one case, and a negative revulsion toward hostility in the other.

It is time now to return to Hermarchus's two stages of social development, as set out in §2. How do they compare with those of Lucretius? There is considerable agreement on the origin of laws; for both authors agree that some individuals taught others how to calculate what is useful.[39] These people are a group of intellectually gifted individuals who also fit Epicurus's description of law-givers (*Principal Doctrine* 37, as discussed in §2). In addition, Lucretius supplies an example of this initial sort of calculation: humankind was all the more willing to comply with the leaders "because each person was ready to punish more fiercely out of anger than was now permitted by just laws" (5.1148–9, LS 22L). This illustrates the comparative form of a typical calculation
p. 218 (*epilogismos*). ↳ Its content, however, is unique to Lucretius; for it is a response to a prior descent into a societal condition of out-of-control anger, in which each person sought to avenge himself against others. This period of vengeance is missing from Hermarchus's narrative (as well as from Epicurus's analysis). Instead, Hermarchus blames violence on lapses due to forgetfulness, not on a deliberate policy of aggression.

These lapses, on the other hand, nicely fit Lucretius's description of the initial stage of compact making. As I argued in §4, at this stage people have just reached the threshold of rationality, at which they still rely on memory, not calculation (*epilogismos*), to secure what is in their interest. Memory is "irrational" in the sense that it is without calculation, but this does not prevent it from giving rise to either preconceptions or deliberate policy. I am inclined to agree with others, therefore, that Lucretius's two stages correspond roughly to Hermarchus's two stages, though they are marked by significant differences: Lucretius explicitly recognizes the initial agreements as compacts, thus recognizing the initial stage as a stage of justice; he further assigns a special role to pity in the first stage; finally, after positing an interval of rampant violence, he proposes that disgust for violence brings about the establishment of laws. These similarities and differences suggest to me that both Hermarchus and Lucretius elaborated Epicurus's theory in ways that are compatible with what Epicurus said, while displaying a certain permissible originality. Whatever intermediate sources Lucretius may have drawn on, his account is by far the more novel of the two. My own guess is that his account derives ultimately from an early Hellenistic source other than Epicurus or Hermarchus, possibly another close associate of Epicurus.

Lucretius makes no more mention of pity after the first compacts. What, then, happened to it in the social development of humans? It clearly vanished from communal relations in the decent to violence. Does it then reappear in the establishment of laws? Though Lucretius does not tell us the content of the first laws, it is quite plausible, considering his extremely negative characterization of the preceding violence, that he agreed with Hermarchus in supposing that the first laws prohibited the killing of humans. If one looks further ahead, on the other hand, one might expect some return of pity in laws that deal with the weak. A large proportion of laws typically deal with various kinds of weakness, encompassing not only physical, but also mental, social, and political disabilities. In this wider sense, the weak include not only children and wives, but also orphans, widows, the elderly, the intellectually inferior, resident non-citizens, and those defeated in war. Even in later stages of society, moreover, the circumstances under which pity first arose remain essentially the same: the stronger members of the family still pity their weaker children and wives. Restored to some degree of peace, then, will the strong, now differentiated according to their various kinds of strength, go on to pity their correspondingly weak fellow citizens (and perhaps others as well), just as men previously pitied one another's children and wives in a community of neighbors?

There is the persistent problem that, however much fellow citizens are restrained by the penalties of law, they are still beset with only a few exceptions by a misguided lust for power and wealth. In the case of friendship, there is ample evidence that the Epicureans valued it not as a civic bond, but as an alternative to political
p. 219 participation. ↳ In the case of pity, on the other hand, nothing prevents fellow citizens from learning to extend it to the weak among them, or indeed outside the community, in order to gain a benefit for themselves. Pity serves in this way as a civic, not merely a private bond. Is it possible, then, for fellow citizens to learn to extend pity to others as a genuinely other-regarding concern, serving not as a means of self-interest, but in combination with self-interest? Lucretius does not say so. But by placing pity at the very foundation of justice, he points to the possibility of combining self-interest with a concern for others for their sake.[40]

6. Conclusion

According to Epicurus, humans acquire justice by learning to make compacts, agreeing not to harm one another and thus securing what is advantageous for themselves. Using Epicurus's theory as a framework, Lucretius adds pity for the weak to the first compacts as the foundation of justice. Pity begins as a spontaneous feeling for the weak within the family and is subsequently extended by means of compacts to the weak in a community of neighbors. In keeping with the self-interest of Epicurus's theory, the neighboring men, who make these compacts, secure their own advantage by agreeing not to harm each other. They do so, however, by extending the pity each feels for his own wife and children to children and wives in the community as a whole, thus safeguarding the common attempt to protect families. By combining self-interest with pity in this way, Lucretius opens up the possibility of combining self-interest with a genuine concern for others for their sake.[41]

Notes

1. All translations are my own, though much indebted to Bailey 1926 and 1947.
2. Mitsis 1988: 98–128 provoked a vigorous debate by his proposal that Epicurus held that friendship is choiceworthy for its own sake. He has also offered a recent update (2019).
3. See note 29.
4. Cf. Aristotle's use of *sumbolon* at *Int*. 16a5. See also Bollack 1975: 355, and Goldschmidt 1977: 27–8, 40.
5. Our main source is Diogenes Laertius 10.33 (LS 17E). For discussion, see Asmis 1984: 19–47, Morel 2008, Tsouna 2016, and Sedley 2018: 108–13. See also Taylor, this volume.
6. See Alberti 1995: 181–3. Morel 2000: 404–8 suggests that justice is both an inseparable property of communities and an accident in its particular realizations (408); cf. Besnier 2001: 145–7.
7. In his account, Lucretius (1.445–50, LS 7A) adds void to bodies as something self-existent.
8. See Algra, this volume.
9. *SVF* 3.340–6. See Tsouni (2019) on this tradition; also Asmis 2021.
10. See Epicurus's summary in *Men.* 127–35, and Diogenes Laertius 10.117–21 and 135–8; *Principal Doctrine* 3 (LS 21C) focuses on the limit of pleasure.

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11. This is a so-called *katastematic* pleasure, as opposed to *kinetic* pleasure. On the two types of pleasure, see Mitsis, this volume.
12. On this facility, see *Men.* 130 (LS 21B), *Principal Doctrine* 21 (LS 24C), and Usener 469.
13. I have added "[property]" in a place where the text is uncertain. The general sense is guaranteed by "has the nature of justice" just a little later in *Principal Doctrine* 37.
14. On the procedure, see Asmis 1984: 50–1, and LS, vol. 1: 90–7. On the need to "fit the preconception," see also Usener 3.
15. See Pohlenz 1965: 333; Heinimann 1945: 59–89; Ostwald 1986: 85–136; and De Romilly 1971: esp. 24–49.
16. As Plato explains this continuity in his *Laws*, the making of laws, *nomothesia*, came into being when a number of clans, each with their own customs (*nomoi*, *nomima*), formed a larger settlement and a chosen group of law-givers then selected some of these customs and appointed magistrates to oversee them. What was previously a custom thus continued as a formally decreed law, administered by government officials (*Laws* 3, 681b–d). Plato also states at *Pol.* 295a that a law-giver may decree either unwritten laws, consisting of ancestral customs, or written laws. De Romilly 1971: 24, 44 emphasizes the interdependence of customs and laws.

17. So Goldschmidt 1977: 26, 141, cf. 168–9; see also 1982: 318–19 (claiming that compacts were initiated by law-givers). Morel 2000 appears to follow Goldschmidt.

18. Philodemus *Rhetorica* 1 col. 238.18–29 (Nicolardi), where Epicurus's close associates Metrodorus and Hermarchus are included among those whom it would be parricide to oppose.

19. See also *Vatican Saying* 7; Usener 531–2; and Cicero *Fin*. 1.50.

20. See Konstan's pioneering work (1973, 2008) on Epicurean psychology, with special reference to the fear of death.

21. See Annas (1993, 293–302), who suggests that the two conceptions may be reconciled by Epicurus's optimistic view of human nature as inclined to cooperation. As Mitsis 1988: 96 points out, contractual justice is the "outward expression of psychic justice."

22. The main sources are *Men*. 132 (LS 21B); Diogenes Laertius 10.138 (Usener 504); and Cicero *Fin.* 1.42 and 50–4, and 2.51–9.

23. See note 18.

24. See Sedley's overview at 1998, 62–93.

25. I omit from consideration here a very fragmentary and controversial text on parental love: cols. 66–8 of Demetrio Lacone, Aporie Testuali ed Esegetiche in Epicuro (PHerc. 1012), edited by Puglia (1988). As I argue in "Epicurus on Parental Love," (2021), what Epicurus reportedly said is not (as Puglia takes) that parental love is not natural, but that it is absurd to suppose that it is not natural. I also consider here how it fits Epicurus's first stage of human development.

26. Mitsis 1988: 84, note 56, followed by Armstrong 1997; 327.

27. Mitsis 1988, 106, note 15.

28. Campbell 2003: 254, 258, 280.

29. As a major representative of this view, Bailey 1947, vol. 3: 1484 notes that Epicurus's "austere utilitarian doctrine" of justice "is undoubtedly softened and humanized" by Lucretius. In his opinion, Lucretius "does not revolt from the Epicurean idea, but gives it a more natural and human background." Ernout-Robin 1928, vol. 3: 139, commenting on
p. 221 5.1019–23, notes that, in contrast with Epicurus's view of justice, Lucretius's compacts are based on ↳ a "sentiment, non un calcul réfléchi"; see also Boyancé 1963: 243. Müller 1972: 41–3 stands apart from this tradition by drawing a strict distinction between the feeling of pity in the family and the motive of advantage in the making of compacts. He insists that Lucretius's first compacts aim only at advantage; in particular, they are not the command of a spontaneous "Nächstenliebe" or any moral sentiment. Algra 1997 made a considerable advance on previous scholarship by showing that there is nothing instinctive or inborn about the "sentiment" found in the first families; rather there is gradual development of other-concern, forming a kind of "appropriation" (*oikeiôsis*) to others. Algra does not give separate attention to pity.

30. Philippson 1910, 297–8, 332 claims that the contracts are "stillschweigend"; cf. Sasso: 1979: 14, 94. I agree with Müller 1972: 43 that there was a rudimentary use of language.

31. Forced to narrate synchronous developments in succession, Lucretius immediately catches up after his section on the first compacts by offering a detailed explanation of the development of language (at 5.1028–90), followed by an account of the discovery of fire (at 5.1091–104), which people already used at the beginning of family life (5.1011)

32. As Diogenes Laertius 10.33 (LS 17E) reports, one cannot assign a word to a thing unless one has previously formed a preconception.

33. Lucretius later uses *aequum* in place of "just" in the expression *legibus aequis* at 5.1149.

34. As it happens, the only Greek philosopher who gave extended treatment to pity was Aristotle, who famously argued that one cannot feel pity (*eleos*) for close members of our family since we experience their suffering too directly, as something terrible rather than piteous (*Rhetoric* 2, 1386a18–24). This seems to me true in the case of a present calamity. It does not correspond, however, to the range of experience in ordinary life, as illustrated by Andromache's poignant appeal to her husband in Homer's *Iliad* to take pity on herself and his infant son, which Konstan 2001: 61–2 calls "proleptic" pity,

directed at a future contingency, not a present disaster. Hector does indeed take pity, but ignores it (erroneously, from an Epicurean point of view) for the sake of his honor.

35. Lucretius's view is also opposed, though there is no space for discussion here, to the Stoic theory of the development of disinterested other-concern as a step-by-step extension of parental love. See Klein, this volume.

36. Some scholars have denied that Lucretius here uses *amicities* in the same sense as Epicurus used the term *philia,* "friendship"; see Armstrong 1997: 327, note 8 and Konstan 1997: 111; 2008: 92).

37. Cicero *On* Ends 1.68 (LS 22O); see also note 2. It has been conjectured that *Vatican Saying* 23 was inserted into the collection of sayings as a later addition, reflecting the view of these Epicureans (see Brown 2002: 78–9).

38. As emphasized by Cicero, *On Ends* 1.66–7 (LS 22O).

39. Porphyry *On Abstinence* 1.7.5–1.10.

40. I shall consider elsewhere Lucretius's own private motives for teaching the Romans, as well as Diogenes of Oenoanda's explicit pity for those not yet enlightened by Epicureanism.

41. This paper owes much to audiences in Chicago and at the Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in San Francisco. I am especially indebted to comments by Corinne Gartner, Constance Meinwald, Kirk Sanders, Julie Ward, the editors of this volume, Jacob Klein and Nathan Powers, and above all to Rachana Kamtekar for her encouragement and meticulous reading of my work.

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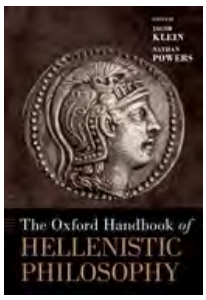
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CHAPTER

10 Roman Epicureanism of the First Century BCE

Jeffrey Fish, Kirk R. Sanders

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Abstract

Our knowledge of ancient Epicureanism depends greatly on the writings of Cicero, Lucretius, and Philodemus, all of which were produced in Italy during the first century BCE. Nevertheless, scholars have long disagreed both about the extent of Epicureanism's influence on the general population of Rome within the late Republic or early Empire and about the nature and depth of commitment to Epicurean philosophy by its professed adherents among the Roman elite. A careful examination of the contemporary sources, however, provides good reasons for taking at face value the claims made by Cicero and others regarding the widespread popularity of Epicureanism during this period, as well as for the potential "orthodoxy" of prominent first-century Epicureans (such as L. Calpurnius Piso) actively engaged in Roman politics.

Keywords: Cicero, Epicureanism, Lucretius, orthodoxy, Philodemus, Piso, politics, popularity, Rome

Subject: Classical Philosophy, Philosophy

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I. Epicurus and Epicureanism

Our knowledge of Epicureanism is heavily dependent on surviving sources from the first century BCE produced in Roman Italy. These sources include the philosophical dialogues written by Cicero near the end of his life, between 45 and 44 BCE; Lucretius's didactic epic poem, *On the Nature of Things*; and the treatises of Philodemus, many of which are partially preserved among the Herculaneum papyri.[1] Nevertheless, studies of Epicurean philosophy have, at least until relatively recently, continued to be cast primarily in terms of the study of the philosophy of Epicurus himself.

This restricted focus on the school's eponymous founder was in keeping with the enduring scholarly consensus that Epicureanism, in contrast to its Hellenistic rivals, had been largely static and rigidly doctrinaire. This view had antecedents among some of Epicureanism's ancient critics.[2] Eduard Zeller's influential histories of Greek philosophy helped it gain traction in modern scholarship. Zeller bemoaned Epicureanism's "philosophical sterility" and "intellectual torpor" and asserted that no later Epicurean had "made any attempt worth mentioning" to the development of the school's doctrines.[3] Many subsequent histories of Hellenistic philosophy well into the twentieth century endorsed and perpetuated these stereotypes. The tide, however, has begun to turn in the more recent past, and scholars from the late twentieth century to the present have generally taken a more nuanced view of the Epicurean tradition and of the debates and developments within it.[4]

It is certainly true that Epicurus and a select group of fellow, first-generation figures—in particular, Metrodorus, Polyaenus, and Hermarchus—enjoyed a special standing throughout the long history of the school, and their collected writings assumed a kind of canonical status within it.[5] It is also important to keep in mind, however, that such reverential attitudes toward the "Founding Father(s)" were not only a common
p. 225 feature ↳ of ancient Greek philosophical schools generally but also arguably *the* principal source of cohesion and identity for the schools that arose within the Hellenistic period in particular.[6] And, as even a passing familiarity with the history of, say, Christianity, Islam, or Judaism should make clear, genuine allegiance to revered authority figures and even canonical texts still leaves ample room for both intense exegetical disputes and substantive doctrinal developments.[7] Epicureanism was no exception in this regard, as attested by the surviving evidence from the first century BCE in particular.

The attempt by later Epicureans to produce a general theory of the emotions offers one especially good example of the potential for both innovation and disagreement. The outlines of such a theory can be detected in, e.g., Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* (*TD*) and the fragmentary remains of several works by Philodemus. Like their Stoic rivals, these particular Epicureans (including, apparently, Philodemus himself) regarded emotions as essentially cognitive; that is, as constituted by beliefs, including value judgments, and the desires to which these give rise. Accordingly, the theory they developed attempted to adapt and extend Epicurus's own famous division of desires to a new but philosophically-related context, distinguishing between "natural" and "empty" or "vain"—as well as "necessary" and "non-necessary"—expressions of various emotions.[8] One of the most relevant texts in this regard, Philodemus's *On Anger*, suggests that this particular doctrinal innovation did not win universal acceptance within Epicurean circles.[9]

Other, well-documented examples of disagreement among later Epicureans include questions about the meaning and scope of Epicurus's disparaging comments concerning both rhetoric and the composition (or interpretation) of poetry.[10] Cicero in his *On Moral Ends* reports a variety of competing claims regarding the proper foundation for friendship.[11] And Cicero's Epicurean contemporaries apparently also disagreed even about whether the central claim of Epicurean hedonism—namely, that pleasure is the good—required proof; and if so, of what sort.[12] It is, of course, typical in such debates for all sides to champion their own *bona fides* while simultaneously insisting upon their opponents' heresy. However, this fact itself only highlights the difficulty or danger in attempting to apply labels such as "orthodox" or "heterodox" to disputants within a tradition that is still developing and evolving, as was Epicureanism throughout the Hellenistic period.[13]

Epicureanism remained officially headquartered in Athens throughout the Hellenistic period and into the first century BCE. At least through the mid-first century BCE, the school's official leader, or scholarch, continued to reside, study, and teach at "the Garden," the Athenian estate purchased by Epicurus and bequeathed to his successors upon his death in 270 BCE for the permanent use of the school.[14] From its infancy, however, the reach of Epicureanism extended well beyond Athens. Indeed, even its origins were actually elsewhere. Epicurus had established his first school in Mytilene in 310/09 BCE.[15] Shortly thereafter, he relocated to Lampsacus, where he remained until his migration to Athens in 305/4 BCE.[16] Some of the followers he attracted along the way, including his closest associate, Metrodorus, accompanied Epicurus to Athens, but others apparently

p. 226 remained behind and maintained some form of organization in both ↳ Mytilene and Lampsacus. Evidence of subsequent correspondence between Epicurus and his followers in both locations survives.[17]

Within Asia Minor and Greece, we have records of Epicurean circles in a variety of other locations over the course of the Hellenistic and imperial periods. Testimony from Philodemus suggests thriving centers of Epicurean activity at Cos and Rhodes, which may have even attempted to establish themselves as rivals to the Garden's authority.[18] A letter from Diogenes of Oenoanda in the second century CE expresses his intention to meet up again with fellow Epicureans in Chalcis and Thebes, as well as Athens.[19] And Lucian, also writing in the second century CE, refers to Epicureans throughout the Pontus region on the Black Sea, with especially large numbers in Amastris.[20]

Already by the second century BCE we have evidence of Epicureanism as far east as Syria, where both Antiochus IV and Demetrius I had close relations with the Epicurean philosopher Philonides.[21] It may have been around this same time that Epicurus came to the attention of the Jewish inhabitants of the region.[22] The Hebrew term *ʾapiqoros*, which derives from the Greek proper name *Epikouros*, eventually comes to mean simply "heretic."[23] While its derivation and original referent seem lost on the Talmudic writers of the third and fourth centuries CE, earlier Jewish literature such as the Mishnah and Tosefta reserves the term specifically for Epicureans or adherents to Epicurean doctrines.[24]

Epicureanism was also certainly known in Egypt, and not only in Alexandria. According to Plutarch, the attempt to recruit followers from Egypt began with Epicurus himself, though the extent of his success, if any, is unclear.[25] However, Epicurus's friend and pupil Colotes (c. 310–260 BCE) is known to have dedicated a work to the Egyptian monarch Ptolemy Philadelphus.[26] Several papyrus fragments containing identifiably Epicurean writings have been found in Egypt. Among these is *P. Oxy*. 215, which preserves fragments from a first-century BCE copy of an Epicurean theological treatise.[27] The accurate and extensive knowledge of Epicureanism demonstrated by Philo Judaeus points to an active Epicurean school at Alexandria in the first century CE, and further evidence of Egyptian interest in Epicureanism outside Alexandria is found in a papyrus from the second century CE containing a request for various books of Epicurean philosophy.[28]

II. Epicureanism among the Romans

As far as the Romans are concerned, an anecdote in Plutarch's biography of the Hellenistic king (and early adversary of Rome) Pyrrhus indicates that at least some awareness of Epicureanism—including its rejection of divine providence and its championing of pleasure as the *summum bonum*—had reached Italy during Epicurus's own lifetime.[29] The influential poet Quintus Ennius (239–169 BCE) may also have engaged to some extent with Epicurean ideas in his works, which are regrettably known to us now only through fragments and references
p. 227 preserved in later authors.[30] The year ↳ 155 BCE saw the famous embassy of Greek philosophers to Rome.[31] The group of three philosophers sent by Athens (ostensibly for the purpose of seeking the remission of a fine imposed on the city for the sacking of Oropos) notably included an Academic skeptic (Carneades), a Peripatetic (Critolaus of Phaselus), and a Stoic (Diogenes of Babylon), but no Epicurean.[32] The reason for this omission remains unknown, though speculation has ranged from the absence of any Epicureans with the "celebrity status" of Carneades or Diogenes, disinterest on the part of the Epicureans themselves, or even antipathy toward Epicureanism among Athenian officials.[33] Hostility toward Epicureanism on the part of authorities in Rome itself, however, may also have been a factor. Athenaeus reports the expulsion from Rome around this time of two Epicurean philosophers, Alcius and Philiscus, "on account of pleasures they attempted to introduce."[34] While Athenaeus's statement that the expulsions took place "during the consulship of Lucius Postumius" leaves it uncertain whether the year in question was 173 or 154 BCE, the report suggests in either case both that Epicureans were already active in Rome by the mid-second century BCE and that their proselytizing met, at least early on, with significant and specifically targeted opposition.[35]

The earliest Roman convert to Epicureanism known to us by name is Titus Albucius, who served as praetor in Sardinia c. 105 BCE. His conversion to Epicureanism occurred more than a dozen years earlier in Athens, where Albucius spent at least part of his youth. An extended stay in Athens or elsewhere in Greece would later become common for Roman elites wishing as a final stage in their education to study Greek philosophy and rhetoric in their native environment. Albucius, however, seems to have taken things much further during his own stay in Athens, going native in a way and to a degree that earned him a reputation among his compatriots as especially affected and eager to pass for Greek rather than Roman.[36] As praetor, Albucius infamously organized a triumph-like celebration in Sardinia to commemorate his victory over what amounted to a band of Sardinian bandits. His petition for a corresponding *supplicatio* (an honor normally bestowed in celebration of, and as thanksgiving for, a significant military victory) upon his return to Rome was denied by the Senate.[37] Shortly thereafter, Albucius was charged with and convicted of malfeasance, perhaps even in connection with the expenses of his Sardinian "triumph," whereupon he returned to Athens and reportedly spent his exile in the further study of philosophy.[38]

It would not be long, however, before Epicureanism would be able to claim more illustrious Italian adherents, as it established a hold on educated Romans comparable to, and perhaps even greater than, that of its rival schools during the first century BCE.[39] The extent to which this appeal may have extended beyond the Roman elite has been a source of controversy. In *On Moral Ends*, Cicero explicitly credits Epicurean hedonism with enjoying the support of the "general public" (*populus*, 2.44). In *TD*, he similarly represents the Epicurean school as the preferred choice of the masses (*multitudo contulit se ad eam potissimum disciplinam*, 4.6) and describes exponents of Epicurean teachings as "having taken all Italy by storm" (*Italiam totam occupaverunt*, 4.7), noting disdainfully the widespread acceptance of Epicurean arguments among the "uneducated" (*indoctis*, 4.7) in particular.

Notwithstanding Cicero's characterization, modern historical scholarship has generally discounted the idea that Epicureanism enjoyed genuine mass popularity in Italy during the first century BCE and beyond.[40] Given the relative paucity of evidence concerning non-elites, especially those living in the Italian *municipia* outside of Rome, any position on the matter is necessarily somewhat speculative. Nevertheless, we are more inclined than most to take Cicero at his word on this point.

Later Latin authors such as Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BCE–65 CE) and Quintilian (c. 35 CE–ante 100 CE) continue to treat Epicureanism as a significant contemporary influence in Roman Italy.[41] Among Seneca's many references to Epicurus or Epicureanism, two in particular seem to support the claim that the school's appeal in his own day was not restricted merely to elites. In *On Benefits*, Seneca describes his Epicurean adversaries as "a self-indulgent and sheltered mob" (*delicata et umbratica turba*, 4.2.1). A slightly more congenial reference in his *Moral Letters* is even more explicit. Seneca composed this series of epistles to his friend Lucilius, who may himself have been an Epicurean, between 63 and 65 CE.[42] Near the conclusion of one wide-ranging letter (*Ep.* 79.15), Seneca offers Epicurus as a prime example of someone whose renown had increased posthumously. In contrast to the virtual anonymity the Greek philosopher once claimed to have endured, Seneca notes "the great extent to which not only the more cultured (*eruditiores*)" among his Roman contemporaries "but also the ignorant mob (*imperitorum turba*) admire Epicurus."

Seneca's choice of the term *turba* in both of these passages is, of course, loaded. The word inevitably carries connotations of disorder, commotion, and turmoil.[43] To describe a crowd as a *turba* is at least in part to highlight its unruly, undisciplined nature. Though Cicero employs the more neutral terms *populus* and *multitudo* in the passages cited from *On Moral Ends* and *TD* respectively, it is also true that to describe something as popular or plebeian is for Cicero frequently a means of attempting to discredit that of which he disapproves.[44] Both the reference in the latter work to Epicureanism's "uneducated" (*indoctis*) adherents and the characterization in the former of the general public as possessing maximal power or influence but minimal competence (*is qui auctoritatem minimam habet, maximam vim*) smack of Cicero's general disdain for "the many." But such caveats and qualifications do not by themselves cast doubt upon the associated *quantitative*

claims regarding Epicureanism's relative popularity. While the use of *turba* to describe a group of people may insinuate something unsavory about the intellectual or moral character of its members, the term also strongly suggests a certain critical mass in terms of sheer numbers. A mob may be by nature unruly, but it is also always numerous. Similarly, any appeal to something's mass popularity as a means of attempting to impugn it (e.g., as beneath the consideration or dignity of intellectuals or elites) would be seriously undermined if the degree of its popularity were invented out of whole cloth or obviously exaggerated. Consequently, it seems prudent not to discount Cicero's claims of Epicureanism's popularity in the first century BCE (or Seneca's with regard to its continued popularity in the first century CE) in the absence of better evidence to the contrary.

In the relevant passages from *TD*, Cicero links the spread of Epicureanism throughout Italy to the appearance of
p. 229 Latin expositions of Epicurean philosophy written by Gaius ↳ Amafinius and a subsequent wave of imitators. Amafinius's own dates are uncertain. The prevailing view places him at the end of the second century or beginning of the first century BCE; however, a date closer to the mid-first century is compatible not only with the evidence of *TD* 4.3.7 but also with roughly contemporaneous evidence from Cicero's personal correspondence that link Amafinius to one Catius Insuber, an Epicurean who apparently authored a four-book work entitled *On Physics and the Ethical Goal*.[45] In a letter from early 45 BCE to his friend C. Cassius Longinus, himself a convert to Epicureanism, Cicero refers to Catius as only recently deceased (*qui nuper est mortuus*; *Fam*. 15.16.1–2). In his reply, Cassius contrasts Epicurus with the "incompetent translators" among Latinate exponents of his philosophy, of whom he offers Catius and Amafinius as the prime examples (*Fam*. 15.19.2–3).[46] Cicero's *Academica* characterizes Amafinius—in conjunction with another, also presumably Epicurean, philosopher named Rabirius—as someone whose work suffers from its use of ordinary language (*vulgari sermone*; *Acad*. 1.5) at the expense of any technical vocabulary. And a seemingly related reference in *TD* laments a class of self-styled philosophers responsible for a relatively large body of literature in Latin who write without regard to "clarity, arrangement, elegance, or style" (*neque distincte neque distribute neque eleganter neque ornate scribere*; *TD* 2.7).

It seems worth asking who the intended audience for non-technical, Latin-language expositions of Epicurean philosophy produced during the first half of the first century BCE could have been.[47] The correspondence between Cicero and Cassius shows both men united in their disdain for such works, despite their very different stances toward Epicurean philosophy more generally. It is not difficult to imagine that other members of the Roman elite, whose education and means would have obviated the need for mediation of original Greek sources through inferior Latin translations or summaries, shared a similar attitude. Some, like Cicero himself, would have even spent time studying in Greece. Others, perhaps like Cassius, would at least have been exposed to one or more of the famous Greek teachers of Epicureanism in Italy.[48] All were presumably able to read the writings of Epicurus and his companions and successors in the original Greek. Consequently, it seems reasonable to conjecture that the works of Amafinius and the like were intended to reach a different, and more broadly popular, audience.

Of course, "broad" and "popular" should be understood here in relative terms. Both the absence of the means necessary for the mass production of texts (each copy of a work still had to be produced by hand) and the comparatively low rates of literacy in the Roman Republic and early Empire placed notable constraints on the potential circulation and consumption of literary works of any sort. There was certainly no "popular literature" in the Roman world in the sense that designation might suggest today, where a single work can easily and quickly reach an audience of millions or more.[49] But without entering into the details of the lively debate over the nature and extent of ancient literacy generally, there is a case to be made for sizable pockets of literacy throughout Roman Italy at levels of society below the likes of Cicero and Cassius, especially among members of the military and the merchant class. The existence of literate "non-elites" in sufficient numbers could help explain the potential market for the work of Amafinius and other Latin authors lacking literary pretensions,
p. 230 without suggesting that anything ↳ like a majority of ordinary Romans derived whatever understanding of Epicureanism they may have had from literary sources.[50]

III. Epicurean Statesmen of the Late Roman Republic

A different set of problems confronts us with respect to allegiance to Epicureanism among Roman elites in the first century BCE, about whom we are far better informed. By the mid-first century, the Epicurean school counted among its adherents or sympathizers such prominent, and diverse, Romans as T. Pomponius Atticus, Cicero's close friend, publisher, and frequent correspondent; L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, consul in 58 BCE, father-in-law to Julius Caesar, and patron of the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus; M. Fabius (or Fadius) Gallus, a wealthy and politically connected friend of Cicero who, like Piso, owned a villa at Herculaneum; C. Trebatius Testa, an eminent jurist and adviser to both Julius Caesar and Augustus; C. Vibius Pansa Caetronianus and (probably) A. Hirtius, who jointly served as consuls in 43 BCE; T. Manlius Torquatus, praetor in 49 BCE and Epicurean spokesman in Cicero's *On Moral Ends*; and, as previously mentioned, C. Cassius Longinus.[51] To this list may also be added C. Velleius, the Epicurean spokesman in Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, for whom we regrettably have only the internal testimony of that dialogue, in which Cicero nevertheless identifies him as both a senator and one of the leading Roman Epicureans of his day; and L. Cornelius Sisenna, praetor in 78 BCE and author of early and prominent histories in Latin; as well as perhaps L. Papirius Paetus, a patrician friend of and correspondent with Cicero who resided permanently in the Bay of Naples; and L. Lucceius, another senator (as well as unsuccessful candidate for consul in 60 BCE) and friend of Cicero.[52]

Whether or to what extent even Julius Caesar himself had Epicurean allegiances—as, e.g., Cicero seems to suggest in *Pis*. 25.59—has been the subject of much debate. At a minimum, his camp in Gaul was regarded as a hotbed of Epicureanism.[53] Castner includes Caesar among her "Epicurei Incerti," stating that the "ultimate verdict must be a strong suspicion of sympathy with Epicureanism."[54] In the years of his dictatorship and following his death, however, Roman Epicureans were to be found in both the pro- and anti-Caesar factions.[55] Most notable among the latter was Cassius, who along with Brutus (whose own philosophical allegiance was to the so-called Old Academy), became a leading conspirator in Caesar's assassination.[56]

Whatever their particular allegiances, most of the Roman Epicureans of whom we are aware were politically engaged, and therein lies the root of what has proven one of the central stumbling blocks for understanding and assessing the influence of Epicureanism at Rome in the first century BCE and beyond.[57] Most scholars have taken their political involvement as straightforwardly incompatible with the well-known Epicurean
p. 231 admonitions to "withdraw from the many" and to "live unnoticed." ↳ It has accordingly been common to regard professed or attributed philosophical allegiance to Epicureanism among members of the Roman elite as little more than an affectation that could be easily set aside if and when it proved inconvenient or at odds with other social values. So, for example, Momigliano writes: "The problem … is how Roman Epicureans could reconcile their political enthusiasms with their philosophical allegiance."[58] The explanation for their alleged "break with the Epicurean tradition," he claims, "is to be found partly in the irrational. Enthusiasm for freedom explodes many doctrinal barriers." Ferguson sees two forces at work: "First, the individual's capacity for ignoring any aspect of religious or philosophical belief inconvenient to a daily way of life. Second, the capacity of national cultures (and the Romans were especially adept at this) to conquer by absorption. One need only reflect on Christianity's history to see millionaires acknowledging a Master who said 'Woe to you rich!' or soldiers professing loyalty to a Lord who told them to turn the other cheek. It is not a surprise to find equally compromising Epicureans."[59] And Castner in her prosopography of Roman Epicureans proclaims the "essentially ornamental role that Epicureanism played in the lives of most of its known Roman adherents."[60] These accusations are serious and imply that scores of Roman statesmen and Hellenistic rulers, many of whom were in close conversation with prominent Epicurean philosophers, had not seriously brought their professed philosophical commitments to bear on crucial personal and practical decisions. If true, this would also mean that the philosophers who were in close association with these statesmen were flatterers, content to dilute the necessarily harsh medicine of the philosophy of Epicureanism's founders. More recent scholarship, however,

has begun to push back against this line of thought as an oversimplification or even distortion that has its origin in the anti-Epicurean polemics of Cicero and Plutarch.[61]

It is true that, all things being equal, a committed Epicurean should shun the career of a statesman, since it tends to produce disturbances of various kinds, in particular friendship-destroying envy.[62] Such disturbances jeopardize one's chances of securing personal safety, an important concept in Epicurean socio-political thought and the bedrock upon which a pleasurable life can be constructed.[63] If Aristotle encouraged his students to go into politics, Epicurus did the opposite.[64] For example, we have record of him advising a certain Idomeneus, a dignitary of Lampsacus, to withdraw from his position.[65] Epicurus is known to have ridiculed famous statesmen of the past and referred to politics as a kind of "prison" (*Sententiae Vaticanae* 58).[66] The lust for glory that so often serves as the driving motivation for politicians figured in Epicurean thought as a desire that was both non-natural and non-necessary.[67]

Nevertheless, there is reason to believe Epicurus also allowed that participation in politics might provide a better chance for personal safety than other alternatives in at least certain circumstances. Many of his authoritative pronouncements, including those that concern political life and personal safety, incorporate qualifying phrases that reflect a greater flexibility than has frequently been recognized.[68] His directives regarding politics were not dogmatic principles on par with a foundational ethical claim such as "pleasure is the highest good." Rather, they leave room for the inference that political prominence, while not an ideal or
p. 232 even generally advisable path to personal safety, ↳ is nevertheless in certain circumstances a perfectly justifiable one. We are told in *Key Doctrine* 14, for example that "the simplest form of achieving safety arises from a quiet life and withdrawal from the many." The same saying acknowledges, however, that security can come "to a certain extent, through the ability to repel [attacks] and through prosperity." *Key Doctrine* 7 seems to suggest even more clearly that political participation could itself, under the right conditions, be a choiceworthy option:[69]

> Some people wished to become famous and admired, thinking that they would thus gain the security that comes from other people.[70] Accordingly, if the life of such people is in fact secure, they acquire a natural good. But if their life is not secure, they do not possess the objective they originally sought which was in accord with what is suitable to nature.

This maxim has usually been interpreted as an absolute prohibition of political participation, on the grounds that political power is inherently futile and cannot confer safety.[71] In the most obvious reading of the saying, however, the possibility that the natural goal of safety might actually be attained through such means is explicitly acknowledged.[72]

Although Lucretius seems to acknowledge only grudgingly that the persons described in *Key Doctrine* 7 might in fact attain safety through their prominence, he has no admiration for aspiring politicians. His own emphasis is on the way those struggling to make it to the top render themselves vulnerable to envy.[73] Epicurus, however, may have had a more balanced view, which perhaps acknowledged that the likelihood of any given person's success would depend upon the manner and circumstances in which he sought distinction.[74] In any case, even "orthodox" Epicureans were able to imagine scenarios in which a political career, given the viable options, might well be a person's best alternative and could be managed with compelling virtue. The Epicurean sage Philonides converted Demetrius I Soter (160–152 BCE) to Epicureanism and tutored him in its philosophy.[75] There is no suggestion that he thought Demetrius should resign and withdraw among friends. Lucretius, a hardline follower of Epicurus, speaks of the need for his poem's addressee, Memmius, to pursue his statesmanship for the common good.[76] We know much more of Philodemus and his patron Calpurnius Piso (consul 58 BCE), a professed Epicurean, and we even possess a fragmentary treatise on statesmanship, *On the Good King according to Homer*, that Philodemus dedicated to Piso, probably during or shortly before Piso's governorship in Macedonia (56 BCE).[77] In the treatise, Philodemus, using Homeric kings as both positive and negative models, shows that by the virtuous exercise of authority, one can rule to the mutual advantage of

oneself and one's subjects, inspiring their love and enhancing the chances of one's own safety.[78] Practical wisdom (*phronêsis*) and the importance of good public relations receive special emphasis (Odysseus features as a model of clever self-promotion), as do "kingly virtues" that Romans would associate closely with pity (*misericordia*) and mercy (*clementia)*, virtues which respectively Calpurnius Piso and his son-in-law Julius Caesar saw as defining qualities of their careers.[79] Rather than being heterodox, as was once supposed,
p. 233 Philodemus's work fits into the larger Epicurean framework of discussions of personal ↳ safety, illustrating how Epicurean philosophy could be responsive to and compatible with practical realities.[80] Presumably the principles elucidating how one may rule virtuously and shrewdly found in *On the Good King According to Homer* reflected in general what was found in Epicurus's lost *On Kingship*.[81]

If Epicurus's own views, as well as those of his first-century followers, were indeed more nuanced than some ancient and modern critics might acknowledge, what are the circumstances that might have justified an Epicurean's political career? One recent suggestion by Sean McConnell emphasizes a fragment of Epicurus in Plutarch (*De tranq. an.* 464F–466A):

> Not even Epicurus thought men who were in love with fame and honor should lead a quiet life, but they should indulge their nature by taking part in politics and public life, on the grounds that they are constitutionally more likely to be disturbed and corrupted by inactivity, if they do not obtain what they want.

Society being what it is, someone has to govern. Why not (the argument goes) leave it to lovers of fame whose nature is apparently incurable by Epicurean therapy? This arrangement will benefit glory-lovers by indulging their nature, thus giving them their happiest life (though naturally not a very good one); and it will benefit serious Epicureans, who themselves would never get entangled in a political life, by supplying order for society, without which Epicurean community could not exist. Despite not engaging in politics themselves, Epicureans could nevertheless also provide advice for these rulers on how to rule.[82]

However attractive this argument may appear, it faces several difficulties. One is the truly disordered state of these individuals who are to rule. While McConnell makes some effort to address this concern, he seems to underestimate the extent to which these particular vices, ambition (*philotimia*) and love of glory (*philodoxia*), are connected in Epicurean thought with psychological problems so profound that it would be difficult for anyone motivated by them to rule well.[83] We might imagine Epicurus telling those who either could not or would not be cured of their obsession for glory just to go into politics and be as happy as they can. It is another thing altogether, however, to suppose he maintained that there could not be rulers, including even Epicureans, who rule from better motivations. A recently published text from *On the Good King according to Homer* shows Philodemus speculating on advice Homer would give two different kinds of rulers.[84] For our purposes the distinction between his two categories of rulers is the relevant matter:

> And I suppose he (sc. Homer) would say that it is fitting *for those especially yearning for glory* (for they would otherwise never have deliberately chosen to devote their own lives to setting the multitude in order) and presumably *for all those desirous of a beneficial reputation*, to win over those who …[85]

The first category of individuals would appear to refer to Homeric heroes, and, by implication if not directly,
p. 234 those in general who are motivated by glory, without the hope ↳ of which they never would have pursued political power. The second category, which is probably meant to refer to Philodemus's addressee, Piso, and to other statesmen like him, consists of people, by contrast, in pursuit of a "beneficial reputation." They understand both the origin of a good reputation (i.e., virtue) and its instrumentality (the provision of personal safety and the prospect for further beneficial actions) in a way that the glory-seekers do not.

This testimony is consistent with what we find in in Philodemus's *On Rhetoric* about the help that philosophy can provide a statesman. At the end of *On Rhetoric* III, where he has been invoking the authority of Metrodorus

and speaking in the first person plural as though conveying the teaching of the school, he claims that "it would be a fine thing if the politician were also practiced in philosophy, *that he might be still more vividly and energetically a good man*."[86] Statesmen such as Piso and Cassius, and presumably many other Epicureans of their age, were getting more from their sage therapists than recommendations about ruling; they were being taught proper desires and freed from the fear of death.

Piso's own situation may serve to reveal something important about the way Epicurean statesmen presented their motivations for ruling. Although he had performed well enough to request a triumph after successful campaigning in Macedonia, he did not do so. Miriam Griffin observes how Piso framed his refusal in philosophical terms. Cicero reports that Piso not only denied ever desiring a triumph for himself (*negavit se triumphi cupidum umquam fuisse*) but also claimed that those who consider such things to be *praeclara* ("honorable") were *idiotae* ("unphilosophical persons").[87] Although we know enough to tell that the refusal of glory was a major theme of the treatise, it is unclear just how Piso argued this.[88] Observing that Piso rebutted Cicero using the Stoic terms of "true glory" and "false glory," Griffin suggests that Piso probably "took the Epicurean view that the desire for crowns and honorific statues was neither natural nor necessary."[89] On the other hand, she observes that Epicureans "qualified that view by saying that if having a good reputation and renown gave one security, one was attaining a natural goal (*KD* 7)."[90] Piso may have made his case in these basic terms of "glory" and "useful reputation," making it natural for Cicero to respond using a dichotomy of his own. It would be easy for him to equate "useful reputation" with "false glory," which also went by the name "popular acclaim." Whether or not the specific terminology employed by Philodemus belongs to early Epicureanism, the thought behind it is firmly in keeping with that of the earliest stages of the school.

An Epicurean statesman should rule with enlightened motivations, pursuing a good reputation based upon virtuous and mutually beneficial leadership. Presumably the capacity to rule well and having the right constitution for politics (i.e., a political disposition) was generally regarded by Epicurean authorities as a requirement for being in politics, though not itself a sufficient justification. For figures such as Calpurnius Piso, that justification was probably rooted in external factors, including inherited responsibilities.[91] We have no
p. 235 direct testimony to this effect, but we know that Piso, ↳ when he defended himself after his recall from Macedonia, stated that he had won every step of the *cursus honorum* on his first attempt.[92] This is part of his argument related to the refusal of glory, but may also reveal something about his decision to enter politics and the way that he justified his career. Although of course Piso had to work to get elected to various positions, he could make the case that his heritage had opened doors for him that others would have to force open with an effort that entailed ambition. He was, in other words, quite the opposite of what Lucretius pictures with his allegory of Sisyphus—a politician who, because of an insatiable thirst for glory, continues to seek election even though he loses again and again.[93] His career was no reckless pursuit of glory. Cicero, who had a lot at stake in this argument personally, since he was a "new man" (*novus homo)*, was no Sisyphus either. He had made it to the pinnacle; but such a meteoric rise, which in his case also required tremendous effort, could also look dubious from an Epicurean perspective.[94] He even spoke in Homeric terms of having an abiding desire since boyhood to be at the top.[95] Someone with the family connections of Piso could claim that he and others like him could have a political career without such ambition.

What then of well-known Epicurean admonitions such as "live unnoticed" (*lathe biôsas*) or "do not engage in politics" (*mê politeuesthai*)? We lack good information about the original context for these pithy maxims.[96] But we can perhaps draw a lesson from consideration of the summary of some of Epicurus's other ethical views as provided by Diogenes Laertius in *Life of Epicurus*. DL 10.119, the same section in which the seemingly absolute denial of the sage's participation in politics appears, actually begins with what appears to be a similarly unequivocal statement on the question whether the sage will marry or have children: "The wise man will not marry and beget children, as Epicurus says in his *Problems* and his work *On Nature*." The very next sentence, however, seems to backtrack: "Occasionally, under certain circumstances in his life, he may marry." What at first blush appears a strict prohibition is immediately mitigated and qualified by another citation. It has been

plausibly suggested that that most if not all declarative statements attributed to Epicurus regarding what the wise man will or will not do should be thought subject to similar qualifications.[97]

The fact remains, of course, that in ideal or even ordinary circumstances, the Epicurean sage will not engage in politics. To a critic such as Cicero, this mutual exclusivity between the ideal life of the sage and that of the statesman was presumably scandalous enough. He would have had little cause for concern to focus on any qualifications or nuances in the Epicurean position in his attacks on it. *Pace* Cicero and his modern counterparts, however, first-century Epicurean politicians were quite plausibly following the best path to secure the best possible life available to them, in accordance with genuine Epicurean principles. There is no reason to doubt their commitment to Epicureanism, or to presuppose that this commitment was at odds with the conduct of their life.

Notes

1. Unlike Cicero and Lucretius, Philodemus was not a Roman citizen. He immigrated to Italy from Gadara, in modern-day Syria, by way of Athens, where he had studied philosophy at the Epicurean Garden under Zeno of Sidon. Once in Italy, however, he achieved prominence in the local intellectual and literary circles of first-century Rome, as attested by, among other evidence, references in Cicero *Fin*. 2.119 and Cicero *Pis*. 68, 70. On Philodemus's life, see Armstrong and McOsker 2020: 1–10.

2. See, e.g., Numenius's comments as preserved in Eusebius *Praep*. *Evang*. 14.5.3, "The later Epicureans as a rule never expressed opposition either to one another or to Epicurus on any matter worth mentioning. On the contrary, they even condemned innovation as indecent, or rather impious."

3. Zeller 1883: 245–6. This particular claim was excised after Zeller's death from the work's thirteenth, and final, German edition (= Zeller 1928) by the editor W. Nestle, who actually rewrote much of the material on Epicureanism; it is therefore absent from the most recent, English translation (= Zeller 1931); however, see Zeller 1890: 257.

4. See, e.g., the contributions in Fish and Sanders 2011, as well as the authors' introductory comments to that volume.

5. On the special status enjoyed by Epicurus, Metrodorus, Polyaenus, and Hermarchus, who were jointly referred to as "the Men" (*hoi andres*), see especially Longo Auricchio 1978.

6. Cf. Sedley 1989: 97.

7. Epicureanism even had its own controversies over what properly constituted the relevant canon: later Epicureans debated, as modern scholars still do, whether the *Letter to Pythocles* preserved in Diogenes Laertius was indeed the product of Epicurus's own hand.

8. See also Mitsis, this volume.

9. See now the excellent edition by Armstrong and McOsker 2020, with introduction and English translation.

10. In the case of the former, some Epicureans argued that Epicurus's comments were not part of a blanket condemnation of rhetoric but intended only to apply to its political and forensic branches; see, e.g., Sedley 1989: esp. 107–17. Many of the essays collected in Obbink 1995 address the disagreements surrounding Epicurus's comments on poetry. See also McOsker 2021.

11. Cicero *Fin*. 1.65–70.

12. Ibid., 1.29–31.

13. Cf. Dillon 1988: 125.

14. For the relevant provisions of Epicurus's will, see Diogenes Laertius 10.117. The last Epicurean scholarch of whom we have secure evidence is Patro, who according to Phlegon of Tralles (*FGrHist*. 257 fr. 12 par. 8) succeeded Phaedrus in 70/69 BCE.

Nevertheless, Diogenes Laertius assures us (10.9–10) that the Epicurean community continued uninterrupted in some form down to his own lifetime, which is usually taken to be sometime in the second century CE.

15. Following the chronology of Apollodorus reproduced in Diogenes Laertius 10.14–15.

16. Though Epicurus was born on the island of Samos, his father, Neocles, was an Athenian cleruch. Prior to returning to Athens to settle permanently, Epicurus completed a year of compulsory military service there at the age of 18, in 323 BCE (see Diogenes Laertius 10.1); after which he returned to Asia Minor. There is a slight discrepancy in the sources regarding
p. 237 the date of Epicurus's permanent relocation to Athens: the date 305/4 BCE derives ↳ from Apollodorus's chronology (see note 15), while Heraclides puts the date "during the archonship of Anaxicrates" (Diogenes Laertius 10.2); i.e., in 307/6 BCE.

17. On Epicurus's correspondence with Lampsacus and Mytilene, see Usener frr. 107–10 and 111–14 respectively.

18. See, e.g., Philodemus *Rhet*. II col. 52, 11–23 (in the edition of F. Longo Auricchio, 151; translation in Chandler 2006: 123).

19. Fr. 62.II in Smith 1993.

20. Lucian *Alex*. 25.

21. *PHerc*. 1044, one of the papyri recovered from the Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum, contains a fragmentary biography of Philonides, who is known also from inscriptions. For further discussion of Epicureanism in Syria, see Crönert 1907 and Benferhat 2005: 48–50. For more on Philonides, see later in this chapter.

22. For a useful summary of relations between Antiochus IV and the Jews, see Habicht 1989: 346–50. Frankel 1851/2: 212–14 argues for Epicurean influence upon Judaism as early as Antigonus of Soko (*floruit ante* 250 BCE), whom later tradition associated with the foundation of the Sadducee sect.

23. Labendz 2003 traces the use of the term over several centuries of early Jewish writings, beginning with the Tannaitic period (70 CE to c. 220 CE); see p. 177 in particular for her discussion of the Hebrew word's etymology.

24. Ibid., 175–84.

25. See Plutarch *Mor*. 1129A.

26. Plutarch, *Adv*. *Col*. 1107D.

27. Edited most recently by D. Obbink (= Obbink 1992).

28. On the Alexandrian school, cf. Ferguson 1990: 2281–2; on the school in Egypt outside of Alexandria, see Keenan 1977.

29. Plutarch *Pyrr*. 20; cf. Cicero *Cat*. *Mai*. 43; cf. Benferhat 2005: 44–7.

30. So, e.g., Cicero *Div*. 1.132 and *ND* 3.79 attribute to Ennius denials of divine providence that may be indebted to Epicurean theology. Ennius certainly exerted at least a poetic influence on Lucretius, whose prologue to *DRN* 1 owes much to the prologue of Ennius's own *Annals*, to which it explicitly alludes.

31. For a detailed discussion of the embassy itself, see Powell 2013.

32. Cicero *Att*. 12.23.2 seems to make a point of noting the absence of any Epicurean representative. See also Inwood, this volume.

33. See, e.g., Champion 2017: 186; Gruen 1990: 177, note 86; and Inwood 2014: 77, respectively.

34. Athenaeus *Deip*. 12.547a–b; cf. Aelian *VH* 9.12, which reports the first name as Alcaius. The same event is presumably included in the reference to the "hostile decrees that cities have enacted against them [i.e., the Epicureans]" at Plutarch *Mor*. 1100d. (All translations from Greek and Latin are the authors' own, unless otherwise noted.)

35. Two distinct individuals named Lucius Postumius Albinus served as consul in 173 and 154 BCE respectively. For a discussion of the opinions and evidence regarding the correct date of the expulsions, see Gabarion 1973, vol. 2: 374–9.

36. See, e.g., *Brut*. 131, in which Cicero refers to "the Greek—or, rather, nearly Greek—T. Albucius." At *Fin*. 1.3.8–9, Cicero uses Albucius as an example of someone "who wishes to be declared thoroughly Greek" and repeats the satirist Lucilius's

account of Albucius's being mockingly greeted in Greek ("*Chaire*, *Tite*") by the praetor Quintus Mucius Scaevola and his attendants during a stopover in Athens en route back to Rome, following Scaevola's service as the Roman governor of Asia.

p. 238 37. Brennan 2000, vol. 2: 476–7. Cicero references this fact (*Prov*. *Cons*. 7.15–16) in attempting to draw an unflattering comparison with Piso, one of the notable Epicurean contemporaries of his own day.

38. On the charge of malfeasance, see Brennan, ibid. Albucius's post-exile devotion to philosophy is referenced by Cicero in *TD* 5.37.108.

39. The standard prosopographical work on Roman Epicureans remains Castner 1988. Ferguson 1990 includes a discussion of figures influenced by (though not always sympathetic to) Epicureanism up through the fifth century CE.

40. Notable exceptions include Guido Della Valle (see Della Valle 1933) and Benjamin Farrington, who in his book *Science and Politics in the Ancient World* enthusiastically endorsed the idea of a mass-movement of non-elites; however, Arnaldo Momigliano's dismissal of Farrington on precisely this point in a much-cited review article has proven far more influential. The first edition of Farrington's book was published in 1939. A second edition subsequently appeared in 1965. For Farrington's considered view on the subject, see Farrington 1965: 160–71. For Momigliano's influential rejection of Farrington's claim of mass popularity for Epicureanism during the first century BCE (in a review of the first edition of Farrington's book), see Momigliano 1941: 150–1.

41. Ferguson 1990: 2281–2, 2284 lists all the explicit references to Epicurus or Epicureanism in the works of Seneca and Quintilian.

42. Ibid., 2282.

43. See *OLD* s.v. *turba*.

44. Cf. Momigliano 1941: 150.

45. Castner 1988: 9 is among those favoring an earlier date for Amafinius. Our evidence regarding Catius Insuber's writings is restricted to a single scholion on Horace *Sat*. 2.4, which states that "Catius was an Epicurean who wrote four books on the nature of things (*de rerum natura*) and on the ethical goal (*de rerum natura et de summo bono*)" (*Comm. Cruq. Ad Hor. Sat.* 2.4.1). Rather than a single work comprised of multiple books, the scholion might be taken to refer to four separate volumes on physics and ethics respectively.

46. Cicero's earlier letter had contained a disparaging reference to Catius's use of the Latin *spectra* to translate the Greek *eidôla*. (Lucretius, by contrast, uses *simulacra* in his *De rerum natura*.)

47. Though one might raise similar questions with respect to the Latin philosophical works of, e.g., Lucretius or even Cicero, the literary skill and pretensions of these authors presumably suffice to set them apart from the likes of Amafinius et al.

48. These included not only Siro and Philodemus but also Phaedrus, who came to Rome in 88 BCE but returned sometime after 86 BCE to Athens, where he became the school's scholarch upon the death of Zeno of Sidon, circa 75 BCE.

49. Cf. Harris 1989: 227.

50. The standard work on the subject of ancient literacy remains Harris 1989, whose own views are decidedly pessimistic**.** For valuable counterpoints, see, e.g., the contributions by N. Horsfall, A. K. Bowman, and K. Hopkins in Beard et al. 1991. As Hopkins notes (p. 134), "if adult male literacy was about 10% across the Roman empire, then there were roughly 2 million adult males who *could* read and write to some extent in the empire as a whole."

51. The evidence regarding each is collected in Castner; cf. again Ferguson 1990: 2262–73 and Benferhat 2005 passim. On Fabius Gaus, to whom Cicero *Fam.* 7.23–7 are addressed, see also Shackleton Bailey 1962: 195–6.

p. 239 52. For Velleius, see *ND* 1.15. On Sisenna, who is oddly absent from Castner's prosopography, see Rawson 1979. Cicero's correspondences with Paetus and Lucceius are contained in *Fam*. 9.15–26 and *Fam*. 5.12–15 respectively. Della Valle, DeWitt, Momigliano, and Ferguson all include an assortment of other, lesser lights, many of whom Castner relegates to her categories "Epicurei Incerti" and "Epicurei Dubii."

53. Cf. Griffin 1989: 31, which cites Cicero *Fam*. 7.12, a letter to Torquatus composed in 53 BCE. See also Armstrong 2011.

54. Castner 1988: 86; cf. Ferguson 1990: 2262, who pronounces Caesar “influenced but not committed.”

55. See Momigliano 1941: 151–5.

56. See Sedley 1997; on the Old Academy, also see Sedley, this volume.

57. Although we limit our discussion to philosophers and statesmen, it should be observed that the reach of Epicureanism in elite culture in the second half of the first century is further evidenced by its apparent influence within the circle of Maecaenas, which included Vergil and Horace, both friends of the philosopher and poet Philodemus. See Armstrong 2004.

58. Momigliano 1941: 156.

59. Ferguson 1990: 2261.

60. Castner 1988: 35. Though the comment appears in the entry on Marcus Fadius (Fabius) Gallus, it is representative of comments Castner makes throughout her prosopography of Roman Epicureans.

61. Cf. Roskam 2007, which was groundbreaking; McConnell 2010; Fish 2011; Armstrong 2011. Griffin 2001 (see esp. 91) argued for a nuanced position.

62. Philodemus *Rhet.* 2 col. 158; see Roskam 2007: 115 for additional references.

63. Cf. Roskam 2020: 291.

64. See Blank 2007: 24, 26.

65. Seneca *Ep.* 22.5–6. See McOsker 2020: 312 for Epicurus’s therapeutic guidance to Idomeneus.

66. E.g., his treatment of Themistocles and Miltiades at Plutarch *Non posse* 1097C.

67. Cicero *Fin*. 159.

68. This is the major theme of Roskam 2007; cf. Roskam 2020: 298.

69. That the prominence at issue in *KD* 7 is likely political in nature draws support from the fact that the preceding maxim deals specifically with political offices: *KD* 6, at least according to the manuscripts: “In order to get confidence from other men, there was the natural good of public office and kingship [*archês kai basileias*], from which [*ex hôn*] one is sometimes able to reach that end” (trans. Roskam). Usener, followed by Bailey and some other editors, excised *archês kai basileias* as a scribal gloss on *ex hôn*. Although the grammar is somewhat strained, the reason for the deletion appears to rest on the assumption, explicitly articulated by Bailey 1926: 352, that kingship and public office could surely not lead to a natural good. For a discussion and survey, see McConnell 2010: 180, who accepts the deletion but understands *archê* and *basileia* as among the things being philosophically considered by the saying.

70. The translation “security from other people” (*tên ex anthrôpôn asphaleian*) reflects the interpretation of Roskam 2007: 37–9, who argues that the traditional understanding of the phrase “security against other persons” is both contrary to the grammar and does not fit as well with Epicurean teaching on personal safety.

71. E.g., Bailey 1947 on Lucretius 3.998. Long 1986a: 71 affirms this, but compare Long 1986b: 293, 324; cf. Fish 2011: 81.

p. 240 72. Cf. Roskam 2007: 37–9; McConnell 2010: 179–81. Griffin 2001: 91. Lucretius seems in agreement with our negative reading of the subjects—i.e., as imprudent in their pursuit of an illustrious reputation, even though they may nevertheless attain safety (see Fish 2011: 82–4).

73. See *DRN* 5.1120 ff., with Fish 2011: 83–7.

74. Cf. the perspective of Griffin 2001: 91 in note 88.

75. Life of Philonides fr. 30.2–4 Gallo 1980. On Philonides, see Erler 1994, 251–5.

76. *DRN* 1.41–3.

77. On the nature of the treatise, see Fish 2021; Fish 2018; De Sanctis 2006; Asmis 1991.

78. This theme of one's virtue eliciting the love of others is a critical one for Epicurean statesmen. Cf. Cicero *Fin* 1.35, where the Epicurean statesman T. Manlius Torquatus speaks of how his ancestor Manlius Torquatus Imperiosus, on account of his bravery, attained "praise and love (*laudem et caritatem*), which are the strongest guarantees of leading a life without fear." Cf. Cassius, defending his Epicureanism to Cicero: "cruelty brings hatred from all and *justice and mercy bring their love*" (Cicero *Fam*. 15.19.1–3, on which see also the comments of Armstrong 2011: 112–13).

79. For Piso, cf. Cicero *Sen.* 17 with Griffin 2001: 88.

80. For the earlier view, see, e.g., Murray 1965: 165; Fowler 1989: 133.

81. So McConnell 2010 and Roskam 2007: 123–5; cf. Warren 2002: 156–7. The genre of *On Kingship* (*peri basileias*) treatises, perhaps founded by Aristotle, is almost entirely lost to us (see Haake 2013 for a discussion). Probably most *On Kingship* treatises consisted of advice for kings (see Murray 2007: 21–6). Many of Philodemus's recommendations would overlap with other treatises, albeit with some significant differences (see Fish 2021). Oswyn Murray 2007: 18, taking the two surviving fragments of Epicurus's treatise, both from Plutarch, at face value, assumes that the treatise "was clearly a satirical attack on the idea that kings should be seen with philosophers. It was a waste of everyone's time." But the evidence does not necessarily bear this out. In one fragment, a paraphrase, we find that Epicurus wrote about kingship "in order that we not live together with kings" (*Mor.* 1127 = Usener fr. 6). Here we may surmise that Plutarch has flattened a discussion on sages and kings in which Epicurus presented an ideal—i.e., the sage's total avoidance of potentially compromising interaction with rulers—accompanied by (non-ideal) scenarios that could justify a sage's keeping company with a king. Murray also claims that Philodemus's disapproval of *bômolochia* (coarse speech) in *On the Good King* is contradicted by the other fragment, a direct quotation, in which Epicurus is said to have advised "even cultured kings to put up with recitals of military stratagems and coarse buffoonery rather than discourses in their symposia concerning music and poetry" (1095c). But Epicurus's point may simply have been that recherche matters requiring philosophical expertise were poorly suited to court entertainment, whose purpose was to please or interest one's attendants. Military strategy might be genuinely useful to a king.

82. McConnell 2010: 191–4.

83. Cf. *DRN* 3.59 ff. which discuss *avarities et honorum caeca cupido*, both rooted in the fear of death, and their catastrophic results. Even if Lucretius devotes more to this connection with the fear of death than Epicurus did, the idea, as Heinze 1897: 58 observes, is "echt Epikureisch." Cf. Konstan 1973: 10, note 25, who approves of Heinze's evaluation. On Epicurean therapy, see McOsker 2020.

84. See Fish 2016 for critical text and commentary on this passage.

p. 241 85. φά̣[ναι] δ' ἄ̣ν οἷ̣|μα̣ι [πρ]οσῆκον τ[οῖ]ς̣ μάλισ[τα] | δόξ[ης ὀ]ρεγομέ̣νοις (οὐ γὰ̣ρ | ἄν π̣ο[τ' ἐ]πιδοῦναι τὸν ἑ|αυτ[ῶ]ν̣ [β]ίο̣ν ε̣ἰς πληθῶν ἐ|πανό̣[ρθ]ω̣ς̣ι̣ν προείλοντο̣) | [τά]χα δὲ [καὶ] π̣ᾶ̣ς̣ι̣ τ̣οῖς ὀν[η]|ς̣[ι]φόρου γνώσεως ἐπιθυμοῦ|σιν, εἰσοικειοῦσθα[ι] τοὺς δυ|[να]μένους … (col. 96, 9–18 Fish).

86. *Rhet*. 3 col. 15a Hammerstaedt 1992. Cf. Armstrong 2011, 121–3, whose translation we have used here.

87. *Pis.* 56; 62. These observations are owed to Griffin 2001: 91, who identifies Piso's refusal to pursue glory as a major theme in his speech. The fact that Piso's refusal to request a triumph coincided with Cicero's return to power has occasioned skepticism about Piso's sincerity (see, e.g., van der Blom 2016).

88. Griffin 2001: 91.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid. It is notable that Griffin, informed by the testimony of Roman Epicureans such as Torquatus, also does not take *KD* 7 to preclude the possibility of achieving security through "reputation and renown."

91. Cf. the discussion on "circumstance of life" (*peristasis tou biou*) in Fish 2011: 92–3; Wigodsky 1995: 61–2.

92. *Pis*. 2.1–2.

93. The Sisyphus allegory in Lucretius 3.995–1002 was thus understood—i.e., as an allegory about a perennial politician, until this reading was replaced in the 1800s with an interpretation in which *imperium* is not actually conferred to the winner of an election because that *imperium* is unreal. See Fish 2011: 76–81.

94. It is regrettable that we do now know more about Gaius Vibius Pansa, who was also a *novus homo*.

95. Privately to his brother (*Q. fr.* 3.5.4).

96. On *lathe biôsas* in secondary sources, see Roskam 2007: 41–4.

97. Wigodsky 1995: 60–1; cf. Fish 2011: 92.

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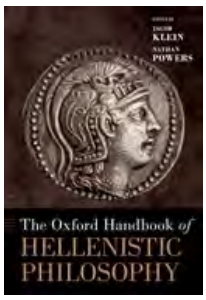
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PART III

THE STOA



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CHAPTER

11 The Physics and Metaphysics of Stoic Corporealism

Katerina Ierodiakonou

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Abstract

This chapter presents the fundamental doctrines of Stoic natural philosophy. The Stoics' conviction that nothing exists beyond nature and that reality encompasses mostly bodies—a view nowadays labeled corporealism—led them to discuss substantive metaphysical issues under the heading of physics. The chapter first examines the Stoics's fundamental corporeal principles—god and matter—as well as the relation of these principles to the four basic elements. It then investigates what the Stoics included within the ambit of reality by focusing on their conceptions of bodies and incorporeals, as well as on their four primary genera of beings (the Stoic "categories"). Based on a reassessment of the ancient sources and the scholarly research of recent years, this chapter presents Stoic physics not (as it has often been viewed) as derivative, but as a sophisticated system that emerged from the Stoics' fruitful critical engagement with their predecessors.

Keywords: Stoic physics, metaphysics, principles, corporealism, elements, matter, god, body, incorporeals, categories

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1. Introduction

By the time Stoicism emerged as a new school of philosophy in Athens, philosophy had already been organized in the Platonic Academy under three general headings: logic, physics, and ethics. The Stoics adopted this division (LS 26A–D), although it met with some initial resistance on the part of Stoics like Aristo of Chios, who insisted that philosophy was a matter of practical wisdom, and hence logic and physics were irrelevant to philosophy (LS 31N). The standard Stoic view however was that, in order to know what one should be aiming at in life, one has to have a thorough understanding of the world we live in and are part of. Physics (*to phusikon*) provides us with a systematic account of nature (*phusis*), that is, of the world and its contents (LS 43A), an account that proves necessary if we are to live virtuously and wisely. For how we live depends, according to the Stoics, on our comprehension of, and hence our attitude toward, the universe and the things in it, including human beings. Physics, therefore, was considered by the Stoics as a crucial part of their philosophical system.

In particular, the Stoics subdivided physics into two sections: specific physics (*eidikôs*), which deals with bodies, principles, elements, gods, limits, place, and void; and generic physics (*genikôs*), which studies the world, elements, and causes (LS 43B). The distinction between specific and generic physics is somewhat unusual, especially since the topic of elements figures in both sections, but it seems that specific physics was meant to examine abstract topics of the kind that Aristotle had previously discussed under "first philosophy" (or what we would call "metaphysics"), whereas generic physics was meant to examine more concrete natural phenomena and their causes.[1] Besides, since the Stoics claimed, as we will see, that nothing exists beyond
p. 248 nature, it makes perfect sense that they classified metaphysical issues under physics, and treated theology ↳ as the culmination of natural philosophy (LS 26C). Most importantly, the Stoics also claimed that the natural world should be thought of as encompassing mostly bodies—what we nowadays label as Stoic corporealism.

In what follows, I present the main physical and metaphysical doctrines of the Stoics in two sections: in §2, I investigate the principles on the basis of which Zeno and his followers structured the physical world; and in §3, I discuss what they included in their conception of reality.

2. The Principles of Nature

2.1. Matter and God

According to the Stoics, the universe (*to pan*) contains both the finite natural world (*to holon/kosmos*) and the infinite void around it (LS 44A). The natural world is sustained (*sunechesthai*) by two principles (*archai*), namely the active and the passive principle:

> **T1** They [the Stoics] think that there are two principles of the universe, that which acts (*poioun*) and that which is acted upon (*paschon*). That which is acted upon is unqualified substance, i.e. matter; that which acts is the reason in it, i.e. god. For this, since it is everlasting, constructs (*dêmiourgein*) every single thing throughout all matter.
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.134 = LS 44B1–2; see also, Aëtius 1.3.25 = *SVF* 1.85)[2]

What the Stoics had in mind is that the active principle constitutes that which acts on things, so as to produce something or to bring about an effect on something. By contrast, the passive principle constitutes that upon which the active principle acts, so as to generate all things in the world. These two principles are further identified in our ancient sources as god (*theos*) or reason (*logos*), and matter (*hulê*) or unqualified substance (*apoios ousia*), respectively.[3] Not only are they supposed to be the basic items of reality, and hence the items in terms of which the world has to be explained, but they are also quite literally the beginnings or starting-points

from which the world was believed to have come into being. Hence, they are eternal, while everything else is generated from them.[4] For god creates the universe, by giving shape or form to matter in such a way as to constitute the world and all things in it.[5]

Contemporary scholars have often drawn close comparisons between, on the one hand, the active and passive principle of the Stoics and, on the other, the demiurge and the receptacle (*chôra*) of Plato's *Timaeus*. It is not just that the terms used by the Stoics for matter (*hulê*) and the creator god (*dêmiourgos*) are to be found in the *Timaeus*, but that the Stoic understanding of them was crucially shaped by an interpretation of this Platonic dialogue.[6] For both Plato and the Stoics conceived of god as a causal agent and regarded matter as a substrate or matrix, which has no quality intrinsic to itself but to which god endows certain characteristics. Also, both Plato's receptacle and the Stoic ↳ matter were thought of as the substance or essence (*ousia*) of things—i.e., as that to which all things owe their being (*einai*). Quite generally, the Stoic account of the world was very much influenced, down to the very language used, by the cosmology of Plato's *Timaeus* as well as by the discussions this had given rise to in the Early Academy. Zeno, after all, started out as a student and associate of the Academic Polemo.[7]

Notwithstanding these similarities, Stoic physics exhibits important points of differentiation from its Academic background. Let me start with the passive principle. The Stoics claimed that matter is finite and unified, neither generated nor perishable, incapable of initiating motion but continuously subject to change, unqualified but inseparably connected with some quality, since it is always pervaded, shaped, and moved by the active principle. It thus becomes the foundation of all bodies:

> **T2** And so the universal body, according to the Stoics, is limited and one and whole and substance. It is whole, because it does not lack any parts; it is one, because its parts are inseparable and mutually coherent with themselves; it is substance, because it is the prime matter (*princeps silva*) of all bodies, and through it, they say, complete and universal reason passes, just like seed through the genital organs. This reason they take to be an actual craftsman, while the cohering body they take to be without quality, i.e. matter or substance, completely passive and subject to change.
>
> (Calcidius 293 = LS 44E1–3; see also, LS 44D and 45H)

Stoic matter, just like Plato's receptacle, was always there and always will be there, for it does not come into being or pass away, since there is nothing for it to come to be from and nothing for it to pass away into. However, given their description of the passive principle, the Stoics most probably thought of matter as completely neutral, whereas its Platonic equivalent contains at least some traces of qualities that are responsible for its chaotic state.[8]

Moreover, the Stoics' use of the term "matter" is ambiguous; it may refer to the Stoic passive principle, but it may also refer to any material from which something is made, that is, from which something comes into being by the agency, ultimately, of god. For if we have a statue made from bronze, bronze is said to be its matter; but bronze itself has a certain complex quality, since it is made from iron and copper, which are also qualified things; each of them is made from still other qualified things that are ultimately made from the passive principle, which is not made from anything and is completely qualityless (Calcidius 289). This is after all why Diogenes Laertius (7.150 = *SVF* 1.87) calls the qualityless passive principle "prime" or "first" matter (*prôtê hulê*); it is matter in the primary sense of the word, and it is the first matter in the sense that it underlies all other matter that is derived from it. But there is also some evidence that the Stoics themselves tried to disambiguate the notion of matter, by making a subtle distinction between matter and substance, which we find in Calcidius's commentary on the *Timaeus*:

> **T3** But several philosophers distinguish matter (*silva*) and substance (*essentia*), such as Zeno and Chrysippus. They say that matter is that which underlies all those things which have qualities;

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> however, the primary matter of all things or their most primeval foundation is substance—being in itself without qualities ↳ and unformed. For example, bronze, gold, iron, etc. are matter of those things that are manufactured from them, but are not substance. But that which is cause of the existence of both the former and the latter is itself substance.
>
> (Calcidius 290 = *SVF* 1.86; trans. B. Inwood and L. P. Gerson)

So, it seems that the Stoics used the term "matter" when they talked, for instance, of the bronze that a statue is composed of, but reserved the term "substance" for the passive principle of all things. In addition, later in the same text, Calcidius reports yet another Stoic distinction between matter and substance: the passive principle was called "matter" relative to the creative causal agent, but it was called "substance" relative to the material body into which the creative causal agent transforms it (Calcidius 291).

The Stoic account of matter, therefore, differs considerably also from that of the Epicureans. Whereas the atomists' materialism was utterly mechanistic, the Stoics understood matter as inseparable from the active principle, and hence gave their natural philosophy a vitalistic and teleological character. The Stoics regarded the world we live in as a living organism endowed with reason (e.g., LS 54A), again following Plato's *Timaeus* (29e–30d) in this.[9] For the Stoic active principle is not only everlasting, ingenerable, and indestructible, but also creator and craftsman (*technitês*), self-moving, and mover of all things; it does not have by itself any specific shape or form, but it is that which makes things have their distinctive characteristics (LS 44C and F). That is to say, the coming into being and passing away of all things in the world is regulated, according to the Stoics, by a rational order governed by a perfect intellect (*logos*); even the world's eternal cycle of coming into being and passing away is regulated by this rational order. In fact, the Stoics assumed that after the total conflagration there remains just one thing, this eternal wisdom, which is the source and explanation for all change, but is not itself subject to generation and corruption.[10] So, given that the active principle is reason, is immortal and governs the world, it only seems fitting to call it "god."

On the other hand, it is clear that the Stoics could not have accepted the conception of god that we find in the *Timaeus* in all its details. For the Platonic god is portrayed as transcendent, as not part of the universe, and as immaterial and not dependent on matter in any way. Such a god, on the Stoic view, would be an empty postulate that could not account for or explain anything, since it would not be able to act on anything, let alone to interact with anything. For, as we have seen, the Stoics are strictly speaking willing to describe the passive principle as "matter" only in relation to something that actively determines its qualities; there would be no material world without god already present in it, and conversely an immaterial god could cause no effects in the world. It is for this reason, therefore, that the Stoics identified the active principle as a perfect intellect in matter, rather than above the whole material world: it is not the case that the Stoic god *has* a soul or an intellect; rather, he *is* this soul or intellect.[11] The Stoic god is firmly and unambiguously in matter, he is in the world, he is immanent.[12]

Furthermore, since the active principle is eternal, it is clearly not to be identified with any of the standard basic
p. 251 elements that are meant to come into being and pass ↳ away—earth, water, air, and fire. Nevertheless, the Stoics also described god as designing fire (*pur technikon*)—i.e., as an all-pervading fieriness that sustains the world and its parts:

> **T4** The Stoics made god out to be intelligent, a designing fire which methodically proceeds towards creation of the world, and encompasses all the seminal principles according to which everything comes about according to fate, and a breath pervading the whole world, which takes on different names owing to the alterations of the matter through which it passes.
>
> (Aëtius 1.7.33 = LS 46A; see also, LS 46D, 47C4–5, and 54B)

The Stoics' conception of a kind of fire that is, by its very nature, immortal and intelligent is not new. They clearly relied in this case on Heraclitus, who seems to have identified god with an everlasting fire that in due measures lights up and goes out to turn into water and further into earth, depending on what the overall balance of things requires. In fact, it is probably the Stoics' corporealism that led them to adopt the Presocratic notion of god as an entity which does not transcend the physical world, but rather constitutes an immanent bodily principle, namely pure fire.[13]

There is also an interesting development in the Stoic doctrine of the active principle considered as pure fire. In contrast to his predecessors, Chrysippus seems to have opted for "breath" (*pneuma*), rather than fire, as the sustaining principle of the world; and he understood *pneuma* as the through-and-through blending of the elements of fire and air (LS 47H).[14] The constitution of *pneuma* from these two elements explains its characteristic motion: since fire was treated by the Stoics as the hot element par excellence and air as the cold element par excellence (LS 47B1), *pneuma* was said to have a constant tendency both to expand and to contract, that is, to move both outwards and inwards at the same time (LS 47I2). The Stoics called this "tensile movement" (*tonikê kinêsis*) or "tension" (*tonos*), and it was compared to the motion of a hovering bird that appears to be at rest in midair (LS 47K). More specifically, fire, being responsible for the outward movement of *pneuma*, was said to generate the particular qualities and quantities of things, whereas air, being responsible for the inward movement of *pneuma*, was said to give them their unity and cohesion (LS 47J3 and M).

In particular, the Stoics postulated different kinds of *pneuma* pervading and supporting all things in the world:

> **T5** There are two kinds of innate breath, the physical kind (*phusikon*) and the psychic kind (*psuchikon*). Some people [i.e., the Stoics] also posit a third, the tenor kind (*hektikon*). The breath which sustains stones is of the tenor kind, the one which nurtures animals and plants is physical, and the psychic breath is that which, in animate beings, makes animals capable of sensation and of moving in every way.
>
> (Galen, *Intr.* 14.726,7–11 = LS 47N; see also, LS 47O2 and Q, Plutarch *Virt. mor.* 451b–c = *SVF* 2.460)

p. 252 What differentiates these three kinds of *pneuma*, but also what explains the differences within each kind, are the varying degrees of tension that characterize every single thing; the degree of tension that characterizes every single thing in turn depends on the proportions of fire and air that determine the *pneuma* penetrating it. It is worth noting, however, that the Stoics used the term "tenor" (*hexis*) in two senses; the narrow sense, indicated above, referred to what sustains inanimate substances such as stones, whereas the wider sense was used for the constitutive *pneuma* of all things, animate and inanimate alike (LS 47P).

2.2. Principles and Elements

Also fundamental for Stoic physics is the distinction between the principles (active and passive) and the four basic elements (earth, water, air, and fire), a distinction about which *Timaeus* is emphatic. For according to the *Timaeus* (48b–c), the elements, far from being principles, as some of the Presocratics thought, and in particular Empedocles, are derivative entities that change into each other. In this, too, the Stoics followed the Platonic dialogue and claimed that it was god who first created the four elements from prime matter, and that everything else was subsequently generated from the mixture of these four elements (LS 46B3 and C, 47A). Thus, the elements seem to be directly derived from the active and passive principle, but differ considerably from these in certain ways, as Diogenes Laertius reports in the following text:

> **T6** They say there is a difference between principles and elements: the former are ungenerated and indestructible, whereas the elements pass away at the conflagration. The principles are also bodies (*sômata*) and without form, but the elements are endowed with form.

(Diogenes Laertius 7.134 = LS 44B3)

There are, however, significant problems in the transmission of this text, which seriously call into question its description of principles as bodies. Most manuscripts read *sômata* in the final sentence of [T 6], but the parallel text preserved in the *Suda* (a lexicon from the Byzantine era) has *asômatous* (i.e., "incorporeal") and the equivalent variant *asômata* has also been considered as an alternative reading by the editors of this text. Contemporary scholars have generally accepted the manuscript tradition, assuming that Stoic corporealism would perhaps sound inconsistent if the Stoic principles were presented here as incorporeal.[15] By contrast, Michael Frede has painstakingly argued that there are good reasons to believe that the correct reading is *asômatous*. He has defended this view both by a thorough investigation of the history of the text and by showing that, in this context, to call the principles "incorporeal" need not create any inconsistency in the Stoic system, since the Stoics may have distinguished different senses of the notion of a body. So, we need to examine more closely, as Frede has suggested, the Stoics' conception of a body.[16]

p. 253 The only properly attested Stoic definition of a body we have is the one to be found again in Diogenes Laertius, who claims that Apollodorus defined body as what is extended in three dimensions:

> **T7** According to Apollodorus in his *Physics*, body is what has threefold extension–length, breadth and depth; this is also called solid body.
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.135 = LS 45E)

It is controversial, though, whether this is the canonical Stoic understanding of what a body is. Long and Sedley, for instance, have put forward the view that this was the standard definition of a geometrical body, which we may find long before the Stoics in Greek mathematics, for instance, in Euclid. So, in order to distinguish a physical body from place or empty space, the Stoics had to supplement this definition by adding "with resistance" (*meta antitupias*), as Galen (LS 45F) and Plotinus (*Enn.* 6.1.26.1–28 = *SVF* 2.315) report. In other words, for something to be a body it should be three-dimensionally extended and should offer resistance, that is, it should interact with another body that acts upon it.[17] However, such a notion of a body does not exactly fit Stoic doctrine. Given that it is central to Stoic physics, as we will see, that two or more bodies can be at the same place, it would be strange if the Stoics were to adopt the requirement that a body offers resistance to another body. But perhaps the main difficulty is that prime matter, the way the Stoics conceived of it, would not be a body on this conception; for it is supposed to be entirely passive, completely inert, and hence could not have been thought to offer resistance and to be an obstacle to god's creative activity. Similar problems arise in the case of the active principle; being active, on the Stoic view, it has to be a body, although it could not have been said to offer resistance either, since it was not meant to be the sort of item that could be acted upon.

After all, Diogenes Laertius presents Apollodorus's definition as the general definition of a body, and only later goes on to say that it also applies in the case of solid bodies. In addition, whatever Diogenes Laertius's sources for his account of Stoic physics may have been, it is hardly credible that the Stoics would have selected a patently mathematical definition of a geometrical solid, if what was needed was a definition of a physical body. Finally, physical bodies have a definite extension, but this extension is not part of their identity, since they can increase or decrease in size and still be the same body; by contrast, geometrical bodies are identified by their dimensions. However, our definition does not require that a body as such have definite dimensions; all it requires is that a body be extended in three dimensions. And this is not by accident. For prime matter is three-dimensionally extended without having any definite dimensions, since it gets its definite dimensions by the active principle. God, too, is a body because he is three-dimensionally extended in matter and could not exist without matter, although matter is not god's matter in the sense that god is constituted from it. Rather, it is matter for god insofar as it is that which the god turns into the visible world.

p. 254 It is, therefore, in this sense that the two principles are bodies, namely, that they are both three-dimensionally extended. The Stoic definition of a body has the very abstract character it has in part to allow for the fact that also god can count as a body, though he is not material in the sense of being constituted from matter. And the passive principle is not a body in the sense of a material body, though it is the matter of a body.

But there is also another sense of the notion of a body, according to Frede, in which the principles could *not* be said to be bodies, and it is in this sense that the principles are incorporeal and distinguished from the elements. For what we need is a sense of "body" in which the elements are bodies but the principles are not, even though the principles too may be bodies in the sense of being something three-dimensionally extended. There is in fact such a sense, but it is not explicitly attested for the Stoics. As mentioned above, the Stoic elements are composites, that is, composites of prime matter and their characteristic quality: fire is what is hot, water what is wet, air what is cold, earth what is dry (LS 47B1). Most importantly, the Stoic elements are not permanent features of the world, since they come into being and pass away, in the sense that they transform into one another. By contrast, the Stoic principles, including matter, do not have these characteristics of corporeality, but are bodies only in a rather tenuous sense: they are three-dimensionally extended, but not quite in the way material bodies are. Therefore, on Frede's view, the principles are bodies, since they are three-dimensionally extended; but they also are incorporeal in accordance with a second and more intuitive sense of what "body" is, since they are without form, ungenerated, and indestructible. This second sense of body is in place in Diogenes Laertius's text, when he compares the active and passive principle to the elements, which are bodies in the sense that they are composite, have form, and are destroyed during the conflagration.

I shall not discuss here the details of the Stoic theory concerning the generation of the elements from the principles.[18] However, there is one feature of the Stoic elements that is particularly worth considering in this context. The Stoics distinguished between active and passive elements. That is, air and fire are active elements, whereas water and earth are passive elements:

> **T8** The chief proponents of the sustaining power, such as the Stoics, make what sustains one thing and what is sustained something different: the breathy substance is what sustains, and the material substance what is sustained. And so they say air and fire sustain, and earth and water are sustained.
>
> (Galen, *Plen.* 7.525, 9–14 = LS 47F; see also, LS 47D and E)

Hence, earth and water are bodylike (*sômatoeides*: LS 46F1), being the primary constituents of the body of the world and of the physical things around us, but they need to be shaped and transformed into the ordinary bodies by air and fire, which together, as we have already said, form the *pneuma* that gives bodies their distinctive characteristics.[19] Does this mean that, according to the Stoics, the passive elements cannot exist by themselves, because they cannot sustain themselves together, whereas the active elements can exist in isolation without falling apart? According to the traditional way in which ancient philosophers thought about
p. 255 the elements, they are supposed to exist ↳ in pure form, and compounds are formed subsequently from them by various kinds of mixture. This is why Plutarch (*Comm. not.* 1085c = *SVF* 2.444) claims that it is ridiculous that the Stoics, on the one hand, posited four elements and, on the other, maintained that air and fire are simple and pure, whereas water and earth are composite and mixed, because they need some kind of *pneuma* in order to be held together. But Plutarch's formulation seems to be misleading and prejudicial since the Stoics do not, in fact, regard water and earth as simple and pure. Rather, what the Stoics insisted was that water and earth can exist only in a mixture with fire and air. As we will see next, the Stoics no doubt had a somewhat idiosyncratic understanding of how things are mixed together.

2.3. Mixture

I have so far defended the view that the basic elements are derived, according to the Stoics, from the two principles: god and matter; what needs to be further clarified is the way these two principles interact with each other to generate the basic elements and, subsequently, everything else in the world. As we have seen, the Stoics claimed that the principles cannot exist in separation, that is, that they are dependent on each other. But one would think that principles are by definition independent of everything: independent of everything that is to be explained in terms of them, but also independent of each other. So, there is a problem as to how to conceive the active and the passive principle of Stoic physics, if they are to count as principles. In particular, there is the problem as to how god, if he is thought to be a body in the sense that he is in matter, and does not exist without matter, can be taken to be an independent principle.

The Stoics tried to settle this issue by introducing a notion of mixture that differs substantially from those of their predecessors. In his treatise *De mixtione*, Alexander of Aphrodisias gives us a detailed account of Chrysippean views on mixture.[20] At first, Alexander presents two views that Chrysippus shares with other ancient philosophers (LS 48C2–3): some mixtures occur by juxtaposition (*parathesis*), when two or more items are placed next to one another, so that their surfaces are in contact and preserve their substance and qualities, for instance, when mixing beans and grains of wheat; other mixtures occur by through-and-through fusion (*sunchusis*), when two or more items mix together their substances and qualities, so that they undergo mutual destruction and something else is generated out of them, as occurs, for instance, in the mixing of medical drugs. Then, Alexander adds Chrysippus's own suggestion:

> **T9** Other mixtures occur, he argues, when certain substances and their qualities are mutually coextended through and through, with the original substances and their qualities preserved in such a mixture; this kind of mixture he calls specifically "blending" (*krasis*); … for the capacity to be separated again from one another is a peculiarity of blended substances, and this only occurs if they preserve their own natures in the mixture.
>
> (Alexander, *Mixt.* 216.25–217.2 = LS 48C4)

p. 256 To illustrate this kind of mixture and confirm that it occurs, Chrysippus gave specific examples: a single drop of wine blends with the whole sea (LS 48A and B); fire passes through iron (LS 48C11); when we blend wine with water and then dip in it an oiled sponge, the wine will be absorbed by the sponge and be separated again from the water (LS 48D).

The Stoics, therefore, stated that two bodies can occupy exactly the same place, and hence disagreed with most ancient philosophers, who thought that it was completely counterintuitive for one body to be in a place simultaneously occupied by another body, or for one body to pass through another body though neither has any empty spaces, or for many bodies to be compressed into one body, and all without detriment to the existence and identity of the bodies involved. Indeed, on the Stoic view, not only god is said to be in matter without both losing their distinctive characteristics; the same applies, for instance, in the case of fire and air, which blended together constitute the Stoic *pneuma*, as well as in the case of the soul that is said to pervade the whole of the human body (LS 48C10–12).

3. The Contents of Reality

3.1. Somethings and Nothings

It has so far been shown that both Stoic principles are, in a certain sense, bodies, being characterized by the fact that they act and are acted upon. Moreover, the elements generated by these principles, as well as all things constituted from the elements, are also bodies, being characterized in the same way. Indeed, the Stoics came to think that only bodies can do something to something—i.e., can affect something—and that only bodies can have something done to them—i.e., can be affected by something. Hence, only bodies should be regarded as beings and causes, strictly speaking, that is, as items which bring it about that something or other is the case. This claim obviously was directed against Plato, Aristotle, and those of their followers who thought that, in order to explain the world we live in—that is, the world of physical bodies that forever change, come into being, and pass away—we have to postulate immaterial beings or substances:

> **T10** Zeno also differed from the same philosophers [Platonists and Peripatetics] in thinking that it was totally impossible that something incorporeal (to which genus Xenocrates and his predecessors too had said the mind belonged) should be the agent of anything, and that only a body was capable of acting or of being acted upon.
>
> (Cicero, *Acad.* 1.39 = LS 45A; see also, LS45B and G)

In other words, the Stoics objected not only to the postulation of the Platonic Forms for the explanation of the
p. 257 things in the world, but equally to the assumption of immaterial ↳ intellects like Aristotle's unmoved movers. For they flatly rejected the thesis, accepted both by Plato and Aristotle, that incorporeals can have any causal efficacy.

Still, contemporary scholars have often pointed out that this curious Stoic doctrine, which treats bodies as the only beings, is taken straight out of Plato's *Sophist* and, in particular, from the passage about the battle between the Giants and the Friends of the Forms (246a–248c).[21] The Friends of the Forms insist, according to Plato, that only those things really exist that are eternal and always the same, namely the Platonic Forms, which are accessible merely to reason; and they distinguish these from the things around us, which always come into being, but never really are, and are accessible merely to the senses. The Giants, on the other hand, insist that a body (*sôma*) and what is (*ousia*) are the same, that only those things exist which can be perceived by our senses, for instance, those that are seen or touched. In what follows Plato proposes a compromise: perhaps they can all agree that those things exist that can affect something or be affected by something. This is a vague formula; one may interpret "to affect something" and "to be affected by something" in the sense of "physically affecting" or "physically being affected," but also in the abstract sense of "making a difference to something." Therefore, Plato hopes that the Friends of the Forms can agree that the soul, though not a Form, is a being, since by its presence it makes a body alive, but also the Giants can agree that justice is a being, since by its presence it makes the soul just.

The Stoics gladly accepted the criterion suggested by Plato for what is to count as an existent being, but they drew from it the inference that the soul, as well as justice, virtue, and all other qualities (*poiotêtes*), should be considered to be bodies, since only bodies can act on something or be acted upon:

> **T11** Our [the Stoic] school holds that what is good is a body because what is good acts, and whatever acts is a body. What is good benefits; but in order to benefit, something must act; if it acts, it is a body. They say that wisdom is a good. It follows that they must be speaking of it too as corporeal.
>
> (Seneca, *Ep.* 117.2–3 = LS 60S; see also, LS 45C)

It is exactly this down-to-earth approach that has misleadingly earned the Stoics the label "materialists," though it is more apt to call them "corporealists."[22] For while they assumed that all beings are bodies, and moreover that there are no beings separate from matter, they did not think that all bodies are material bodies—that is, not all bodies are constituted by matter qualified in a certain way. As we have seen, there is a distinction to be drawn between bodies defined simply as three-dimensional and material bodies constituted by matter. All material bodies are constituted by the presence and interaction of both Stoic principles, which are bodies, but the principles themselves are not material bodies—though neither, again, is any body separate from matter. Even god does not in this sense transcend the realm of the material, though he is not a material body; he is in matter without having matter out of which he is constituted. However, in order to fully understand in
p. 258 what sense the Stoics were corporealists and claimed that only ↳ bodies exist, something must be said not only about their conception of body but also about the sense of "exist" involved here.

By claiming that only bodies exist (*einai*), the Stoics cannot have meant that only bodies are real. To take an example, the Stoics assumed that the world is surrounded by void, into which the world can expand (LS 49F). Although this void is not a being, since it neither affects nor is affected by anything, neither is it nothing, for in this case the world would have no place to expand into.[23] It emerges, therefore, that Stoic ontology or metaphysics is not quite as austere and parsimonious as the statement that only bodies exist might first suggest. In fact, the Stoics also allowed for a class of items that are not existent beings, though they are part of reality; these are the so-called incorporeals (*asômata*):

> **T12** This is how you could show the impropriety of the Stoics' making "something" the genus to which the existent belongs: if it is something it is obviously also existent, and if existent it would receive the definition of the existent. But they would escape the difficulty by legislating for themselves that "existent" is said only of bodies; for on this ground they say that "something" is more generic than it, being predicated not only of bodies but also of incorporeals.
>
> (Alexander, *In Ar. Top.* 301.19–25 = LS 27B; see also, LS 27A and Plutarch *Adv. Col.* 1116b–c)

That is to say, the Stoics distinguished between beings (*onta*) and items that are not beings, but "somethings" (*tina*); the latter are said not to exist (*einai*), but to subsist (*huphistanai*). The Stoics also seem to have taken "something" (*ti*) to be the generic notion, which comprises both beings and somethings in a narrower sense, namely the incorporeals. Hence, the Stoics navigate a course between an ontology containing items such as Plato's Forms or Aristotle's immaterial intellects, on the one hand, and the pure materialism of Epicurus, on the other.

According to the standard Stoic doctrine, there are four sorts of incorporeals (LS 27D): time (i.e., time stretches), void, place, and sayables (*lekta*). The notion of *lekta* was originally introduced by the Stoics to explain assertions or—even more narrowly—true statements.[24] The idea was that, if we say "Dion is running," we are talking about a body, namely Dion; in saying something about Dion we are uttering an expression, which is also to be thought of as a body, namely air configured in a certain way; but what we are saying or asserting, the *lekton*, namely *that Dion is running*, is not a body. Still, it is something—for instance, something understood by those to whom we are saying that Dion is running—and thus it subsists. Similarly, place is not a body but is rather something that is occupied through and through by a body; since bodies could not move without a place for them to move into, places are in this sense real and subsist (LS 49A1 and B1). And similarly for the void into which the world expands: it is not a body, but it subsists (LS 49A2, B2, and C). Finally, the same applies to stretches of time: time is not a body, but for a body to move from one place to another requires time; hence time is something (LS 51A).

p. 259 Among the incorporeals that do not exist but only subsist, the Stoics made a further distinction. If we say "Dion is running," what gets said may be true or false, but in either case it subsists—i.e., it is there to be said; on the other hand, if we say "Dion has been running next month," nothing really gets said that may be true or false.

Now, if it is true that Dion is running, then it is the case, or the fact, that Dion is running, and the Stoics seem to have identified a fact with a true *lekton*, one that may be said not only to subsist but also "to obtain" or "to be at hand" (*huparchein*: LS 34D).[25] In the same way, the Stoics distinguished between past, present, and future: they all subsist, but only the present is at hand, whereas the past is gone and the future is not yet there (LS 51B4 and C5).

> On the Stoics' view, then, when we talk about the fact that Dion is running or about the place of Dion, though we do not talk about a being, we do talk about something. But do we talk about some particular something when we say, for instance, that the soul is immortal or that a human being is two-footed? In general, what was the Stoic position about the ontological status of universal concepts (*ennoêmata*), such as soul or human being? This issue has been extremely controversial among contemporary scholars. Some have argued that concepts, according to the Stoics, do not belong to the supreme genus of "something"—that is, they cannot be considered as somethings—but they cannot also be considered as nothing at all. After all, say the proponents of this view, the Stoics referred to concepts by the unusual plural "*outina*," a neologism that they constructed from the negative particle "not" (*ou*) and the neuter plural of "something" (*ti*), thus marking the difference between not-somethings and nothing at all (*ouden*).[26] By contrast, other scholars have claimed that at least the earlier Stoics thought of concepts as non-existent somethings, although later Chrysippus abandoned them altogether and expelled them from his ontology. Certain passages in our ancient sources that describe concepts as *phantasmata* and not as somethings do not have to be read, in view of this interpretation, as banishing concepts from the supreme genus of something, for they simply deny that concepts are existent beings:
>
> **T13** A concept is a *phantasma* of the mind, which is neither something existing nor qualified, but a quasi-something and quasi-qualified, in the way that the pattern of horse arises even though none is present.
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.61 = LS 30C2, slightly modified; see also, LS 30A)

On this reading of the evidence, the fact that concepts are not among the existents is perfectly compatible with the claim that they are somethings.[27]

I, for my part, have elsewhere defended the view that concepts cannot be, according to the Stoics, not-somethings, but rather belong in the supreme genus of something even if they are not beings. For there are no reliable and uncontroversial ancient testimonies that characterize Stoic concepts as mental constructs lacking substance; when our sources use the noun "*phantasma*," it should not be understood to refer to a figment of the mind, but as having the Aristotelian sense of the content of an impression, that is, as equivalent to the Stoic noun "*phantasia*" (e.g., Aëtius 4.11.4–5).[28] However, if concepts are indeed non-existent somethings, does this
p. 260 mean that we need to assume a fifth ↳ category in addition to the standard four incorporeals listed by our sources: time, place, void, and sayables? Briefly stated, my suggestion is that all Stoics regarded concepts as non-existent somethings, that is, as incorporeals, although the Stoics before Chrysippus seem to have dealt with them differently from the way he did. For they initially considered them as predicates, and thus as incomplete sayables, but from Chrysippus's time onwards they also thought of them in terms of their corresponding definitions, and thus as complete sayables. On this view, Stoic concepts were always treated as sayables (i.e., as the fourth category of incorporeals), ontologically mind-independent items that subsist, whether we think of them or not, and hence belong to the supreme genus of something.[29]

As to the ontological status of mathematical concepts, a closely related issue, our evidence for the Stoic views is again very limited and somewhat inconsistent (LS 50C, E, and G), and scholars have put forward conflicting accounts. Some have claimed that, for the Stoics, mathematical concepts are nothing but arbitrary mental constructs, whereas others have argued that the Stoics thought of mathematical concepts as incorporeals.[30]

Moreover, some alternative positions have also been proposed: for instance, that the objects of geometry were regarded as incorporeals while the objects of arithmetic were mental constructs; or, alternatively, that the Stoics distinguished between the geometrical limits of real bodies that are incorporeals and the mentally constructed limits that are merely stipulative and can be reached through infinite division.[31] Finally, it has been argued that the inconsistency of Stoic opinions in our ancient sources on questions having to do with mathematical concepts reflects an extensive debate between the late and the early Stoics, but also some degree of disagreement among the early Stoics themselves.[32]

3.2. Stoic Categories

Beings, according to the Stoics, can be classified under four primary genera (*prôta genê*), which represent four ways of viewing a body from a metaphysical perspective. These genera were often compared by the ancient commentators to the ten Aristotelian categories, and thus are often referred to as the Stoic "categories":

> **T14** The Stoics see fit to reduce the number of the primary genera, and others they take over with minor changes. For they make their division a fourfold one, into substrates (*hupokeimena*), the qualified (*poia*), the somehow disposed (*pôs echonta*), and the relatively somehow disposed (*pros ti pôs echonta*).
>
> (Simplicius, *In Ar. Cat.* 66.32–67.2 = LS 27F, slightly modified)

The Stoic categories still constitute a much-debated issue and contemporary scholars have suggested divergent interpretations of the Stoic doctrine.[33] Fortunately, the examples of Stoic categories reported in the ancient texts prove to be of some help in our attempt to grasp what the Stoics had in mind when postulating these four
p. 261 categories. ↳ Leaving aside the category of (1) substrates, which are also said to be substances (*ousiai*) and are generally understood as matter, the rest of the Stoic categories give us a classification of characterizations of things: either we characterize something as (2) a certain matter being qualified in a certain way, which will be either (a) the commonly qualified (*koina*), such as for instance a human being, or (b) the peculiarly qualified (*idia*), such as for instance Socrates; or as (3) a certain matter being somehow disposed, for instance, as a virtuous human being; or finally, as (4) a certain matter being relatively somehow disposed, for instance as being the human being on the right or the father of someone.

In addition, we find in Simplicius's commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* a further subdivision of the fourth category of the relatively somehow disposed into (a) the relatively somehow disposed and (b) the relative. The relatively somehow disposed are distinguished from the relative by the fact that what is relatively somehow disposed—for instance, something's being on the right—can start or stop being on the right without undergoing any change in itself, but merely through a change in the thing on the left, whereas the relative—for instance, something sweet—can stop being sweet only when its intrinsic constitution changes:

> **T15** To put what I am saying more clearly, they [the Stoics] call "relative" (*pros ti*) all things which are conditioned according to an intrinsic character but are directed towards something else; and "relatively somehow disposed" (*pros ti pôs echonta*) all those whose nature it is to become and cease to be a property of something without any change or alteration, as well as to look towards what lies outside. Thus when something conditioned according to a differentiation is directed towards something else, it will only be a relative; for example, tenor, knowledge, perception. But when something is thought of not according to its inherent differentiation (*kata tên enousan diaforan*) but merely according to its relation to something else (*kata … tên pros heteron schesin*), it will be relatively somehow disposed. For son and the human being on the right require, in order to subsist, certain external things. For this reason, even without any change a father could cease to be a father on the death of his son, and the human being on the right could cease to be the human being on the right if

> his neighbour changed position. But sweet and bitter could not alter if their internal power did not change too. If, then, despite being unaffected in themselves they change because of something else's relation to them, it is clear that relatively somehow disposed things have their being in the relation alone and not according to any differentiation.
>
> (Simplicius, *In Ar. Cat.* 166.15–29 = LS 29C, slightly modified)

Most sources seem to ignore Simplicius's further distinction and treat the relatively somehow disposed as synonymous with the relative, even though the way the fourth category of the relatively somehow disposed is subdivided follows the standard Stoic tendency to divide a genus into various species, and then to give one of the species the same name as the genus. But it seems plausible that the Stoics did have an epistemological motive for putting forward such a subdivision.[34] For since the ancient skeptics standardly argued from the
p. 262 relativity of sweet and bitter to their unreality, the Stoic classification ↳ of sweet and bitter as relatives, but not as relatively somehow disposed, would indicate that extrinsic factors are not enough to determine whether a thing is sweet or bitter; it is true that something is sweet relatively to something bitter, but it is sweet mainly because of a certain intrinsic character. In other words, although the relevant surviving texts are scanty and somewhat confusing, it seems that the Stoics distinguished in a much clearer way than previous philosophers between relatives with a relational attribute to something else, the relative, and relatives that have or lose their relational attribute depending *solely* upon something else, the relatively somehow disposed.

It also seems that the distinction between the first two categories, that is, the distinction between substrates and the qualified or, more specifically, the peculiarly qualified, served the Stoics in their attempt to reply to another skeptic attack; that is, against the skeptics' use of the Growing Argument, which was meant to undermine the notions of growth and diminution, and thus undermine the Stoics' views on identity. For we know from Plutarch (LS 28A) that Chrysippus discussed this argument (which had been first formulated by the early fifth-century comic poet Epicharmus) and that there was a considerable dispute between the Stoics and the Academic skeptics about the appropriate response to this puzzle, with the Academics pressing it as a successful refutation of the Stoics. Philo (LS 28P1), too, refers to Chrysippus's treatise *On What is Growing*, and we may assume that in this treatise Chrysippus responded to one form or another of the Growing Argument.

Specifically, the Growing Argument purports to show that nothing can increase or decrease in quantity, and hence that nothing can grow; for in growing it would become a different thing, just as the number two, if you add the number three to it, does not become a bigger two, but a different number altogether—i.e., five. Roughly speaking, Chrysippus's response to this puzzle seems to have been the following: If you take a stone, a plant, an animal, a human being, or any kind of object, its substrate is some prime matter. But the identity of this matter constantly changes, as some matter enters the object and other matter is expelled. If we were to identify the object with the matter from which it is constituted, it would change its identity with each addition or subtraction of some matter, and thus it could not be said to grow, since growth involves the addition of matter. For this reason, Chrysippus introduces the notion of the peculiarly qualified, that is, the notion of an individual thing that has a quality peculiar to it, which it does not share with anything else and which it retains throughout its existence; it is, in fact, this quality that makes it the individual it is. Something peculiarly qualified in this way can persist through growth, in spite of the fact that the matter underlying it constantly changes.

Furthermore, Philo (LS 28P2–6) goes on to reproduce another argument from Chrysippus relevant to the Growing Argument. According to Philo's report, Chrysippus asks us to imagine two peculiarly qualified individuals, Dion and Theon, who differ in that Dion is the whole-limbed human being, whereas Theon is the same human being but lacking one leg, where this is the intrinsic difference between them. In other words, Theon seems to be thought of as being the part of Dion that together with a leg makes up Dion. Next,
p. 263 Chrysippus assumes that Dion's leg, which Theon is missing, is amputated, ↳ so that Dion and Theon become exactly alike. But, given Chrysippus's thesis that, even if two qualified bodies can be in the same matter

without losing their distinctive characteristics, it does not follow that two peculiarly qualified things can coexist: once Dion's leg is amputated, either Dion or Theon has to go out of existence. The question is which one of the two. The answer according to the defender of the Growing Argument is that Dion perishes, because Dion is diminished in size and turns into something different, namely Theon. Chrysippus's answer, on the other hand, seems to have been that it is Theon who passes out of existence; for Theon is not something different, but just a part of Dion. So, according to the Stoic view, we should perhaps say that Dion becomes what was just a part of Dion, namely Theon, who ceases to exist as a distinct thing.[35]

4. Conclusion

The appraisal of Stoic physics in the nineteenth century was, for the most part, negative. The natural philosophy of the Stoics was regarded as basically Heraclitean, and thus completely unoriginal, and as subordinate to the practical character of Stoicism, and thus quite rudimentary. Moreover, the philosophical prejudices of the Kantian and Hegelian perspectives, which prevailed at the time among historians of philosophy, often led to the outright condemnation of Stoic corporealism. Fortunately, this philosophical bias was eradicated in the twentieth and twenty-first century and the revival of the study of Stoicism, in general, and of Stoic physics, in particular, has produced many articles and books devoted to the Stoics' views on the four primary genera, on the supreme genus of something, on mixture, on the fundamental principles, and on the relation of these principles to the four basic elements. Based on the reassessment of the ancient sources and the scholarly research of recent years, this chapter has tried to show that Stoic physics should not be thought of as derivative, but instead as a sophisticated system that emerged from the ingenuity of the Stoics and their critical stance toward their predecessors.[36]

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Notes

1. The peculiarities of the subdivision of Stoic physics are discussed in LS 267–8 and in Brunschwig 2003: 206–9.

2. All translations are from Long and Sedley unless otherwise indicated.

3. The Stoics also compared god to the seed (*sperma*) in the seminal fluid and called him *spermatikos logos*—i.e., reason pertaining to a seed (e.g., LS 46B2). For more details on the influence of Aristotle's biology and embryology on Stoicism, see, e.g., Hahm 1977: 60–82.

4. To be more precise, these principles persist eternally throughout, and bring about, the infinite series of temporally finite physical world-orders that the Stoics envision; see also Salles, this volume.

5. For general accounts of the Stoic principles, see, e.g., Hahm 1977: 29–56; Todd 1978; Sedley 1999: 384–6; White 2003: 133–8; Frede 2005.

6. E.g., Plato, *Timaeus* 28a, 29a, 68e, 69a, 69c.

7. For the influence Plato's *Timaeus* exerted on Stoic physics, see, e.g., Reydams-Schils 1999; Sedley 2002 and 2011; Frede 2005: 219–22. For Aristotle's influence on the Stoic notion of matter, see, e.g., Hahm 1977: 43; Lapidge 1978: 164–5; Gourinat 2009.

8. For the points of differentiation between Plato's receptacle and the Stoic matter, see Frede 2005: 221.

9. It is interesting to note that, since the Stoics conceived of the world as a living organism, they attributed to it not only reason but also perception, desires, and impulses (e.g., LS 53Y and 54G).

10. On Stoic conflagration, see Salles, this volume.

11. In what follows, I use "it" when talking of the active principle, and "he" when referring to the active principle as god.

12. On Stoic theology, see Powers, this volume.

13. For the Heraclitean influence on Stoic physics, see, e.g., Hahm 1977; Todd 1978: 158; Long 1996; Sedley 2002.

14. According to Sedley 2011: 59, the introduction of the notion of *pneuma* by Chrysippus, in place of Cleanthes's postulation of fire, was "inspired by the latest Alexandrian medical research, to the extent that this, in discovering the nervous system, seemed to have confirmed the central role of *pneuma* in animating the body. The Stoic world being itself an animate being, it was natural for Chrysippus to extend to the whole of it the same vitalizing *pneuma* that was held to pervade and animate the human body." On the influence of the medical tradition on the Stoics, see, e.g., Hahm 1977: xviii, note 8; Todd 1978: 148; Lapidge 1978: 168.

15. For instance, the reading *sômata* is preferred by LS 374, Gourinat 2009: 55 and Cooper 2009: 97, note 11.

16. In his earlier article, Frede 2005: 215–16 hints at the possibility that the original text most probably read *asômatous*, but it is only in Frede 2021 that he argues systematically in favor of this reading. Todd also defends the view that in this text the
p. 265 principles are said to be incorporeal, but for another reason; according to him, both Stoic principles are analytical ↳ concepts—i.e., they "can perhaps be identified with what the Stoics called *lekta*, or incorporeal statements made about bodies" (1978: 142).

17. LS 273. Gourinat 2009: 56, on the other hand, claims that "three-dimensionality plus resistance cannot be a general definition of body, since the reverse is not a general definition of incorporeals."

18. For the Stoic theory of elements and their relation to principles, see different accounts in Lapidge 1973; Sedley 1999: 387–90; Cooper 2009; Hensley 2018; Salles 2020.

19. On how the varying proportions of elements determine the distinctive characteristics of things as well as their changes, see, e.g., Hahm 1985.

20. For more thorough presentations of the Stoic views on mixture, see, e.g., Todd 1976; Lewis 1988; de Harven 2018; Helle

2018 and 2022.

21. For the basic tenets of Stoic ontology, see, e.g., Goldschmidt 1972; Pasquino 1978; Brunschwig 1994 and 2003; Caston 1999: 148–50 and 176–82; Boeri 2001; Sedley 1999: 395–411; 2005: 119–21; Vogt 2009.

22. See, e.g., Gourinat 2009: 46–7; Cooper 2009: 100.

23. On the Stoic concept of void, see Inwood 1991; Algra 1994: 261–339; Powers 2014; de Harven 2015.

24. On Stoic *lekta*, see Castagnoli, this volume.

25. See Frede 1994: 126–7 and Bobzien 1999: 95.

26. This interpretation can be found in Pasquino 1978: 378; Sedley 1985: 87 and 2005, 120–1; Brunschwig 1994 and 2003; Bronowski 2013; Bailey 2014.

27. Caston 1999: 158–71.

28. A close analysis of this text, which convincingly shows that the term "*phantasma*" should be understood here as equivalent to the Stoic noun "*phantasia*," can be found in Mansfeld 2013: 624–6.

29. Ierodiakonou 2024.

30. On mathematical concepts as mental constructs, see LS 264 and 301; Kidd 1988: 126–7; Sedley 1999: 401–2. On mathematical concepts as incorporeals, see Dumont 1978: 121–34; Mansfeld 1983: 65–6.

31. Robertson 2004; Scade 2013.

32. Ju 2009.

33. For different accounts of the Stoic categories, see, e.g., Reesor 1957; Rist 1977; Graeser 1978; Mignucci 1988; Menn 1999; Brunschwig 2003.

34. LS 178.

35. Ierodiakonou 2005: 126–9. See also, Sedley 1982; Lewis 1995; Brunschwig 2003: 229.

36. I would like to thank the editors of this volume for the careful reading of an earlier draft of my chapter and for their extremely helpful suggestions.

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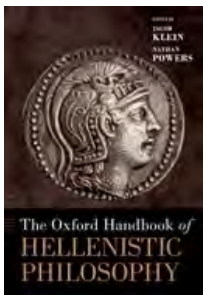
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CHAPTER

12 Stoic Theology and Providentialism

Nathan Powers

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Abstract

This chapter examines the major theological claims articulated within the physical theory of the early Stoics, and the main lines of justification offered for these claims, with special reference to evidence preserved by Cicero. The Stoics take every human to have a natural *preconception* of godhood; and the ultimate source of this preconception is (they maintain) the cosmos itself, in its entirety. To confirm this identification of the cosmos as a divine being, they argue that the cosmos is an organism, animated and controlled by a unifying nature; and that this nature, insofar as it constitutes the cosmos as a perfectly rational agent, is divine. The cosmic order is moreover administered by divine providence: here the Stoics deploy an influential *argument from design*. Stoic views about the value of the cosmic order and the role of human beings (mortal rational animals) within it are then discussed, as well as the complicated legacy of Stoic theology.

Keywords: Stoics, theology, physics, preconception, god, cosmos, nature, divine providence, argument from design, Cicero

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Theology is for the Stoics a part of physics.[1] This is unsurprising, given that they think both that the divine exists and that nothing exists beyond or apart from the natural world.[2] But the Stoics assign a privileged role to the divine in their physical theory. Indeed they maintain that the natural world as a whole—the cosmos—is itself a god, animated by an immanent divine power. And in their view the various physical processes that together compose the cosmic order are all to be explained, ultimately, as operations of this divine power.

This chapter examines the major theological claims articulated within the physical theory of the early Stoics, and the main lines of justification they offered for these claims. After some remarks about the overall structure

of Stoic theology (§1), I shall discuss why the Stoics identify the entire cosmos as a god (§2–§3). In doing so, they intend to identify the cause of the naturally-acquired human *preconception* of god. Their case for a divine cosmos rests partly on the view that the cosmos is an organism, under the control of a unifying nature; and partly on the view that this nature constitutes the cosmos as a *wise person*, at least in the most essential sense of being a "person": a rational living being, with its own perspective and intentions. I shall anticipate this view by referring to the Stoic cosmic deity as "God," reserving "god" uncapitalized for contexts in which the generic features of deities as such are at issue. This cosmic person, God, exercises providential control over the world (§4), a view which the Stoics support through the extensive application of an *argument from design* (§5). I shall conclude by considering questions about the value of the world-order and the special role of humans within it (§6); and the legacy of Stoic theology (§7). It is worth noting at the outset that while the Stoics acknowledge deities other than God, they take all other deities to be, in the final analysis, parts or aspects of God.[3]

Let us set the stage with a pair of doxographical reports that approach the Stoic God from different standpoints:

> **T1** God is an animal which is immortal and rational or intelligent, perfect in happiness, not admitting anything evil, provident towards the cosmos and the things it contains, but not anthropomorphic. He is however the artificer (*dêmiourgon*) of the universe, and as it were the father of all.[4]
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.147, reporting on the Stoics < LS 54A, *SVF* 2.1021)

> **T2** The Stoics made God out to be intelligent, a craftsmanlike fire (*pur tekhnikon*) proceeding methodically towards the generation of the cosmos, and encompassing all the seminal reasonings (*spermatikous logous*) in accordance with which everything comes about according to fate; and a breath (*pneuma*) pervading the whole world, taking on different names owing to the alterations of the matter through which it has passed.
>
> (Aëtius 1.7.33 = LS 46A < *SVF* 2.1027)

T1 offers a complex characterization of God that contains some elements reflecting the basic conception of divinity from which (as we shall see in §2) Stoic theology takes its starting-point: a god is something alive, immortal, wise, happy, and providential. Other elements are due to philosophical reflection or clarification: for example, the claims that God is an artificer or "Demiurge," a term that self-consciously echoes the account of Plato's *Timaeus*; and that God is not anthropomorphic in form (unlike the gods as popularly represented in Greek literature and art).[5] But on the whole, God is described here in a way that is at least recognizable from within the framework of traditional Greek religion. The Stoics indeed made careful use of this framework: for example, the continuation of **T1** (in Diogenes's report) interprets various members of the traditional Olympic pantheon as being particular facets of God, with pride of place given to the father and king of the gods, Zeus.[6] And the Stoics in fact sometimes simply refer to God as Zeus, availing themselves of the name's potent mythic resonances.[7]

T2 describes this same deity in terms of Stoic physics. There are several points to note here. First, God is identified with a particular physical stuff: fire. We also find reported here Chrysippus's refinement of this view, which thereafter became the school's official position: that God is present in the cosmic order as a special substance called "breath" (*pneuma*), a blend of fire and air. The divine stuff, fire or *pneuma*, is thought of as thoroughly pervading the passive material of the cosmos, acting on it so as to constitute distinct physical bodies with all their various qualities.[8]

Second, the description of God in **T2** unmistakably incorporates, word-for-word, the Stoic founder Zeno's definition of "nature" (*phusis*) as "a craftsmanlike fire proceeding methodically towards generation."[9] For a thing to have a nature (as plants and animals do) is for there to be a generative force at work within it, shaping its overall development. What **T2** asserts is that among the things that have such a force at work within

themselves is *the cosmos* taken as a whole. And this nature, shaping the development of the cosmos from within, is God.

Third, **T2** accords a prominent role to "seminal [or "seed-like"] reasonings" (*spermatikoi logoi*) as instruments
p. 271 of divine activity (or perhaps as constituting that ↳ activity). We might characterize these "reasonings" as discrete formulas or sets of instructions for how bodies are to be disposed in particular parts of the cosmos, with the crucial addition that these divine instructions—like seeds—bear the power to see that they are fulfilled.[10]

As we shall see, the points raised in **T2**—that God is *present* throughout the cosmos; that he is present *as its nature*; and that this nature contains instructions for the disposition of bodies—each have an important role to play in our story.[11]

1. The Organization of Stoic Theology

While a number of ancient Greek and Roman authors provide information about Stoic theology, there survives just one ancient source that purports to give a systematic overview of the subject from a Stoic point of view, which therefore must loom large in any investigation of the subject: the speech made in Book 2 of Cicero's dialogue *De natura deorum* (*ND*) by his Stoic spokesman, Balbus. In composing this speech, Cicero will have followed one or more reputable Stoic authorities.[12] He does not represent his source material with perfect fidelity. He adapts it (sometimes aggressively) to the presumed tastes of his Roman audience. He freely digresses, and even more freely abridges. He gives the whole speech an anti-Epicurean spin to fit its dialectical context (since Balbus is responding to a speech on the gods by an Epicurean). Even so, the speech offers a coherent overall account whose details are frequently confirmed by parallel source material, especially by the extensive Stoic material preserved in Book 1 of Sextus Empiricus's *Against the Physicists.*[13] And importantly for our purposes, so far as we can tell Balbus's speech proceeds in a generally "conservative" way that reflects primarily the views of the early Stoic school, and of Chrysippus in particular. I shall proceed on the hypothesis that both Balbus's plan and the actual drift of his argumentation shed some light on the structure and method of Stoic theology, and so can serve as a useful framework for interpreting Stoic views on the topic.[14]

This is Balbus's statement of that plan (with the corresponding sections of his speech indicated in brackets):

> **T3** In general our school (*nostri*) divides the whole topic of the immortal gods into four parts, teaching:
>
> > (A) that gods exist (*esse deos*); [2.4–44]
> >
> > (B) what sort of thing they are (*quales sint*); [2.45–72]
> >
> > (C) that the cosmos is governed by them (*mundum ab iis administrari*); [2.73–153]
> >
> > (D) that they care for human affairs (*consulere eos rebus humanis*) [2.154–68]
>
> (Cicero, *ND* 2.3)[15]

Balbus's fourfold division of his topic in fact reflects a more basic and more structurally important division. As we shall see, for the Stoics (A) and (B) are hard to disentangle: the case for the existence of gods is closely bound
p. 272 up with the question of what they are. And ↳ (D), divine care for humans, is really a subtopic of (C), the providential administration of the cosmos.[16] The main de facto division of Balbus's speech, then, is into two main lines of thought.

The first line (A + B), concerning the gods, comprises what we might call the "theology" proper of the Stoics. Beginning from the basic conception of what a divinity is, Balbus argues that what best satisfies this conception is in fact our cosmos, taken as a whole: we know both that gods exist, and what they are, when we understand that the entire cosmos is divine, by virtue of being an animal that possesses a wise (i.e., perfectly rational) mind. (Other gods are parts or aspects of this overarching divine being.)[17] The case for this claim proceeds, as we shall see, from the bottom up: first it is argued that that the cosmos is an organism with a *nature*; then it is inferred that this nature must be *rational*; and finally, it is further inferred that it is *completely* or *perfectly* rational.

The second line (C + D), concerning the cosmos as such, comprises an elaboration and defense of the Stoic doctrine of divine providence. Here Balbus proceeds from the top down: assuming the truth of the claim that our cosmos is controlled by a deity, he investigates the cosmic order in light of that claim, arguing that we find the cosmos (considered both as a whole and in its parts) to be constituted in such a way that it exhibits and exemplifies God's wise concern for it. It is *well-designed*.

These two lines of thought are of course intimately related, since God is the cosmos: God's providential management of the cosmos is fundamentally a process of self-regulation. Nevertheless, they are distinct lines of thought that form a sequence in Balbus's account. Keeping this fact in view as we proceed will lead to a clearer understanding of both the positions that the Stoics are trying to defend and the method they employ in doing so.

2. The Preliminary Case for the Stoic God

Balbus begins his theological case by discussing the human conception—or more precisely, what the Stoics from at least Chrysippus onwards called the "preconception" (Greek *prolêpsis*)—of god. The significance of this topic is emphasized in Balbus's backward-looking summary, at the beginning of section (B) as described in **T3,** of the Stoic case for the existence of the divine:

> **T4** We possess a definite preconception (*certa notione animi praesentiamus*) of god, first that it is alive, and second that there is nothing surpassing it in all of nature; and I find nothing that satisfies this preconception (*praesensionem notionemque*) of ours better than the conclusion that, first and foremost, this very cosmos (which nothing can surpass) is alive and a god.
>
> (Cicero, *ND* 2.45)[18]

p. 273 But while **T4** makes clear that the preconception of god plays a central role in Balbus's argument, taken in isolation the passage might prove misleading. For it might seem to suggest that the justification offered for the claim that there exists a god is that an existing thing—namely the cosmos—possesses attributes that satisfy our preconception of what a god is. This is however not quite the case that Balbus makes. Rather, the overall line of argument in section (A) is that (1) we are justified in taking one or more gods to exist insofar as we possess a preconception of god; and that (2) on reflection, we find that the cosmos fully satisfies this preconception.[19]

To the modern reader, (1) is apt to seem obviously false or question-begging. But the claim must be interpreted in light of what the Stoics take a preconception to be: a conception that is acquired naturally through numerous similar sensory impressions.[20] For present purposes, the crucial point is that in Stoic usage, "preconception" is a success term: we possess a preconception if and only if we have in fact cognized the general features possessed by some kind of object.[21] And so we cannot *get* a preconception of a sort of thing that does not exist.[22] If, then, we have a preconception "god," that is indeed warrant for the claim that gods exist, just as the preconceptions "cat" and "sunflower" warrant belief in the existence of (respectively) cats and sunflowers.[23]

For the Stoics the difficulty with (1) lies not in the basis it offers for the claim that gods exist, but rather in two adjacent concerns. First, we might question the supposition that humans do in fact possess a genuine preconception of god. What is to say that "god" is not rather a collective fiction that is mistaken for a preconception? After all, people often subscribe jointly to false notions, without being aware that they are doing so. Second, possessing the preconception of god will not prevent someone who is in the grip of incorrect beliefs on other matters from inferring false claims about the gods (e.g., that they do not exist, although in practice the Stoics worry more about mischaracterizations or misidentifications of the divine).[24]

Balbus's initial remarks in section (A) seem intended to address the first of these concerns by specifying the causes of the basic human conception of god.[25] He reports that the early Stoic scholarch Cleanthes recognized several categories of such causes. These include the benefits humans receive regularly from the earth's climate and fertility, etc.; the awe-inspiring force of occasional storms, earthquakes, etc.; and most of all, the uniform motions and beauty of the heavens (2.13–15).[26] I take it that Balbus means to indicate various *public* and *natural* phenomena that impress themselves on the human mind, giving rise to our basic idea of god, and thereby to bolster the suggestion that this idea arises naturally in humans—which is to say, it has the right sort of causal pedigree to count as a preconception, thus establishing that gods exist.[27]

The second concern can be resolved satisfactorily, from the Stoic point of view, only by establishing the divinity of the cosmos. In (A) Balbus proceeds to present a series of brief arguments, deriving mainly from the early Stoics, that together make a preliminary case, in line with the preconception of god, for the identification of the cosmos as a god (2.15–22). These offer some reasons to ascribe to the whole cosmos intelligence and power
 over its various parts.[28] But the main battery of theological arguments is still to ↳ come: Balbus declares his intention is next to secure (*confirmare*) the view which he has sketched out, using arguments specific to Stoic physics.[29]

3. The Nature of the Cosmos

The overall trajectory of Balbus's "physical" arguments (*ND* 2.23–39) is to establish, first, that the cosmos is organized in such a way that it counts as having a nature (*natura*, Greek *phusis*) of its own; and second, that this nature is of the "best" or "most perfect" sort.

Balbus characterizes what a "perfect" nature is by placing it at the end of a spectrum of possible sorts of nature, ranked from inferior and simpler to superior and more complex (2.33–4), in what amounts to a partial description of what scholars have labeled the Stoic *scala naturae* (ladder of being).[30] Such a serial ordering of sorts of beings is possible because each "better" sort includes the powers or abilities of all the ranks beneath it. It should be recalled that in Chrysippus's physical theory, and in orthodox Stoicism thereafter, the character of every physical object is determined by the *pneuma* that pervades its matter—in other words, each of the following categories represents a distinct way in which matter can be determined by the *pneuma* acting within it so as to constitute a physical object.

On the lowest rung of the ladder are inanimate objects, which merely possess the power of cohesion (in Greek, *hexis*) through which they are unified and persist in their qualitative states. Next are plants, which possess a nature (*phusis*) in the narrowest sense: they have powers of growth and nourishment. Then there are non-rational animals, whose natures take the form of soul (*psuchê*), and so which possess in addition to growth and nourishment soul's characteristic powers of impression and impulse, allowing them to perceive their environments and to move in reaction to information from their environments. Next are humans, whose souls also include reason (*logos*), by which they regulate their impulses. This leaves room for a fourth and final class of organisms: gods, whom Balbus describes as "by nature good and wise" (*natura boni sapientesque*, 2.34). Now, humans too are in a sense naturally wise, in that they develop naturally toward a condition of wisdom (perfected reason) and virtue, even if circumstances cause them often and indeed normally to fail to attain this

end. The contrast between humans and gods in this respect is that gods are wise throughout their lives (from the start, *a principio*, as Balbus puts it); there is no natural improvement that gods undergo, because they are never not wise. The thesis to be argued, then, is that the cosmos has a nature of this fourth and best sort: it is divine.

The arguments for the thesis come in three phases.

Phase I is an argument, attributed to Cleanthes, for the conclusion that the cosmos taken as a whole is a thing with a nature of its own—i.e., an organically unified entity with the powers of growth and nourishment (2.23–
p. 275 8).[31] Terrestrial organisms all owe ↳ their natures—their organization into parts and the maintenance of that organization—to the presence of a particular substance that pervades them. Cleanthes calls the substance "vital heat," rendered by Cicero as *calor*; this role in Stoic physics, as already mentioned in this chapter, was played by *pneuma* from Chrysippus onwards. Cleanthes argues that this substance is present also throughout the various large-scale structural components of the cosmos, such as the elemental masses of earth and air, and that it acts in them to similar effect: it both maintains the integrity of each and unifies them all into an organism—i.e., an organic whole whose parts (in the case of the cosmos) nourish and sustain one another.[32]

Phase II takes the conclusion of Phase I (that the cosmos has a nature/*natura*/*phusis*) as granted, and offers an important argument for the further claim that the cosmos has a *rational* nature:

> **T5** (1) Every nature … must have within itself some ruling part (*principatus*): for example in humans the mind (and in the lower animals something like mind), which is the source of impulses. In trees and plants the ruling part is thought to be located in the roots. I use the term "ruling part" as equivalent to the Greek *hêgemonikon*; there cannot and ought not to be, in any kind of thing, something more excellent than this. (2) So necessarily, that which contains the ruling part of the whole of nature must also be the best of all things and the most worthy of authority and control over all things. Now we observe that parts of the cosmos … possess perception and reason. That in which the ruling part of the cosmos resides, therefore, must necessarily possess perception and reason …
>
> (Cicero, *ND* 2.29–30)

To interpret this argument correctly, it is necessary to say something about what the Stoics take a "ruling part" (*hêgemonikon*) to be. It is a distinctive feature of every organism, whether vegetable or animal, that one portion of its *pneuma* constitutes its ruling part. This part coordinates and controls the activity of the *pneuma* that suffuses the other parts of the organism, so as to maintain the organism's overall constitution and determine the course of its development. The *pneuma* of an organism, centralized in this way in a ruling part, is collectively called the organism's nature or *phusis* (and, in the case of animals specifically, its soul or *psuchê*). In animals the ruling part of the soul is also where perceptions occur and impulses to action originate.

Now, Stoics often refer to the ruling part in contexts in which they are discussing animal souls (especially human souls) and in which they have specifically in view the powers of perception and impulse on which animal activities depend; in such contexts "ruling part" is, effectively, roughly equivalent to "mind." If that were what is meant by "ruling part" in **T5**, the argument would run a sharp risk of circularity; because in attempting to show that the cosmos possesses a rational mind, it would then help itself to the assumption that the cosmos has a mind in the first place. However, Balbus makes clear that he has the more general notion of a ruling part in view by referring in **T5**(1) to the ruling parts of both animals *and* plants (a detail helpfully confirmed by
p. 276 Sextus's ↳ parallel report of this argument in *M* 9.119–20). So, the argument does not begin with a contentious assumption that the cosmos has a mind or even a soul; rather, it attributes to the cosmos something it should indeed have, according to the Stoics, if it is (as they have already argued) an organism.

The remainder of the argument depends on the claim in **T5**(1) that an organism's ruling part is necessarily its best (most excellent) part. Cicero does not say exactly why the Stoics think this, but we may surmise it is on

account of the controlling role played by the ruling part in the development and self-maintenance of any organism. The Stoics conceived of an organism's ruling part as pre-existing its other parts—the ruling part is the first part of an embryo to develop—and as comprising within itself all the natural powers (metabolic functioning, perception, and so forth) that are appropriate to the constitution of the mature organism. An organism develops from (and under the direction of) its ruling part, which confers upon its various other parts the powers appropriate to them. This view about the way in which organisms develop nicely grounds the inference in **T5**(2) from the fact that some parts of the cosmos (e.g., humans) possess reason to the claim that the cosmos itself possesses reason: for on this view, if the whole cosmos has a nature, and some naturally-developed parts of it possess reason, then the ruling part of the cosmos must indeed possess reason.[33] The Stoics accordingly take the ruling part of the cosmos to be a mind or intellect, and so take the cosmos to be constituted as a rational animal.

Finally, Balbus argues that the etherial fire of the heavens, being purer and more mobile than its terrestrial counterpart, is a particularly suitable vehicle for intelligence (2.30–2). In light of this view, it is hardly surprising that the Stoics considered the ruling part of the cosmic animal to be located in the heavens.[34]

Phase III is a looser sequence of arguments, some deriving from Chrysippus and others unattributed (2.33–9), whose main thrust is to show that the cosmos, in contrast to human beings, is not only a rational animal, but an animal that is necessarily *completely* rational (and so wise). One consideration offered is based on the claim that an organism will fail to flourish in accordance with its nature only if frustrated from doing so by external circumstances. In the case of the cosmos, however, there are no circumstances external to it which could frustrate its nature.[35] And so, given that the cosmos is by nature a rational animal, it must possess its reason in full fruition throughout its life (2.35–6). In other words, it possesses the "best" sort of nature, that of a god.[36]

Balbus has now articulated the Stoic case for what God is: the cosmos, understood as an animal with a fully and permanently rational nature. The Stoics take an organism's nature (*phusis*), under the direction of its ruling part, to determine all of that organism's intrinsic features. Since the cosmos is an organism that contains all existing things as parts of itself, we might expect the "common nature" of the cosmos—God's nature—to determine comprehensively what exists and what occurs within the cosmos. This is usefully confirmed in a quotation preserved from Book 1 of Chrysippus's *On Nature*:

> **T6** Since the common nature [of the cosmos] reaches everywhere, it must be the case that however
> p. 277 anything happens, in the whole and in any of its parts, it ↳ happens in accordance with common nature and its reason in unhindered sequence.[37] This is because neither is there anything that could interfere with its management (*oikonomia*) from outside, nor is there any way for any of its parts to enter any process or state except in accordance with common nature.
>
> (Plutarch *St. rep.* 1050C–D = LS 54T < *SVF* 2.937)

What remains on Balbus's theological agenda is to explain the crucial role played by God's perfect rationality—divine wisdom—in this natural management of the cosmos. The various component parts of the cosmic order and their various features are all produced through the world's common nature; but *which* parts and features are produced, the Stoics claim, is decided by the wisdom of God's ruling part.

4. The Cosmos as Rational Agent

Balbus begins his account of God's rational activity by recalling Zeno's definition of "nature" (2.57): to say of anything that it has a nature is to say that there is a force at work within it, a craftsmanlike fire proceeding methodically toward generation.[38] This includes the cosmos itself (§3), with an important qualification:

> **T7** (1) While on [Zeno's] theory every nature is craftsmanlike (*artificiosa*) in the sense of having a method or path marked out for it to follow, the nature of the cosmos itself, which encloses and contains all things in its embrace, is said by Zeno to be not merely "craftsmanlike" but also indeed a "craftsman" (*artifex*) deliberating and planning (*consultrix et provida*) for all that is useful and apt (*utilitatum opportunitatumque omnium*).
>
> (2) And just as the other natures are generated, reared, and sustained each by their own seeds, so the nature of the cosmos has all those volitional motions (*motus … voluntarios*), desires, and impulses that the Greeks call *hormai*; and it performs its actions in accordance with these just as we [humans], who are moved by our minds and senses, ourselves do.
>
> (3) Since, then, the nature of the cosmos is of this sort, it can therefore correctly (*recte*) be called "prudence" or "providence" (*providentia*), for in Greek it is called *pronoia*.
>
> (Cicero, *ND* 2.58)

The world's common nature, we are told on Zeno's authority in **T7**(1), is not only "craftsmanlike" but also a "craftsman." This means, note, that it is both. The cosmos exhibits a plan or design in the way it develops, as is the case (on the Stoic view) with anything that has a nature (since nature is craftsmanlike). But the cosmic animal, as a craftsman, is also (Zeno affirms) the *deviser* of the design it exhibits. It is the planner of its own plan.

p. 278 A crucial piece of undergirding for this view is asserted at **T7**(2): the rational constitution of the cosmic animal is in a crucial respect analogous to that of a human, in that it too is has impulses (*hormai*), which the Stoics take to be motions within the ruling part of an animal's soul that determine the animal's actions.[39] Rational animals have rational impulses, that is, impulses activated through the animal's approval of a course of action as appropriate.[40] Since the cosmic animal performs rational actions, it is a *rational agent*.[41]

If the cosmos resembles humans in being a rational agent, it is however unique in the scope of its agency: its choices and its life necessarily play out on the stage of its own all-encompassing body. As it develops, it is planner and crafter of its own various limbs and organs. Its mind (the ruling part of the cosmos) has reasoned out how the other parts of itself are to be disposed and how those parts are to interact with one another, and it forms impulses to act accordingly. These impulses are plausibly to be associated with the "seminal reasonings" of God (see **T2**), that is, the instructions that are applied to various portions of matter in divine action, determining how bodies are constituted and behave: some as inanimate objects and some as objects with natures or souls of their own, all woven into the intricate tapestry of the cosmic order that constitutes God's life.[42] This may explain why Balbus in **T7**(2) says that "just as" other natures have seeds, "so" (*ut … sic*) God has impulses as we humans do: what determines *God's* natural development, and so serves as the seed or generative principle for the cosmos as a whole, is God's own power of rational impulse.[43]

In any case, it is in light of this identification of the cosmic animal (God) as a rational agent that Balbus at **T7**(3) characterizes the nature of the cosmos as "providence" (*pronoia*): the cosmic order is the outcome of God's wise planning. In the immediate continuation of **T7**, Balbus offers a brief account of God's deliberative priorities:

> **T8** This providence is chiefly occupied with the following:
>
> > first, (a) that the cosmos be maximally suited for survival (*ad permanendum*);
> >
> > next, (b) that it be in need of nothing;
> >
> > but most of all, (c) that there be in it outstanding beauty and every sort of adornment.
>
> (Cicero, *ND* 2.58)

This passage indicates that the proper object of divine providence is the cosmos as a whole; but it also indicates ways in which God's concern for the whole cosmos involves concerns for the various parts of the cosmos. To start with what Balbus indicates is most important (c), the cosmos is to be very beautiful, and in a variegated way.[44] This requirement by itself entails a complex cosmic order, containing not just (say) stars, but also gemstones, and flowers, and peacock-tails, and people being kind to one another. And this variegated cosmos is (b) to have what it needs. I take this to be connected to the consideration for what is "useful" and "apt" mentioned in **T7**(1): the various distinct parts of the cosmos are to have the means and resources to flourish in
p. 279 their various modes of existence, so contributing to the beautiful order of the whole. Finally, God is concerned
↳ (a) with the long-term stability of the cosmic order. This will involve, e.g., the world's large-scale elemental masses being balanced against each other in a mutually-sustaining way; but it also entails more particular features of the world such as the reproductive functions of animals and plants (2.127).[45]

5. Divine Providence and the Stoic Design Argument

We have now considered the Stoic case for the school's core theological views, following as our primary guide Cicero's Stoic spokesman Balbus. As we have seen, the Stoics take God to be an animal comprising the entire cosmos; and they take God's nature to be providential in that God's wise mind determines the dispositions and motions of the various parts of the cosmos. We might be surprised that Balbus next proceeds to argue at length for the thesis (stated at 2.73) that the world is administered by divine providence: doesn't this follow straightforwardly from the theological views already defended? Balbus does indeed begin his discussion of the thesis by deducing it from those views (*ND* 2.76–80). But it is important not to mistake his main motivation in defending this thesis. The theological case made so far (under headings **T3**[A] and [B]) concerns God (and gods) as such: we understand the existence and nature of the divine when we understand that God comprises the entire cosmic order, acting as its rational ordering principle. What follows under the heading of the thesis under discussion (corresponding to **T3**[C]) concerns the cosmos and the cosmic order as such: Balbus will argue that our observation of the natural world around us can and should lead us to appreciate it, and to respond to it, as the expression of God's superlative wisdom.

Balbus devotes the longest part of his whole speech (by far) to an argument "from our wonder (*admiratio*) at celestial and terrestrial things" (2.75) for the conclusion that the world is administered by divine providence. The centerpiece of this argument is a sweeping and occasionally lyrical catalog of various observable features of the world that are beautiful or useful, or that tend to the world's long-term preservation, and so that conspicuously reflect God's deliberative priorities (outlined in **T8**). The general claim made about these features is that they each evoke (or should evoke) in us the same reaction of "wonder" that we experience when confronted with very beautiful and/or useful artifacts made by human craftsmen. In short, he offers an argument from design.[46]

Balbus's catalog of wonders is divided into two main parts. It begins with the single most conspicuous and consequential feature of the cosmic order, celestial motion (2.91–7). Were the swift and fiery bodies of the heavens to careen in disarray, this would spell disaster and destruction here on Earth; but instead, the stars and planets move in a way calculated to preserve the long-term stability of the cosmos.[47] It is in making this point that Balbus spells out most explicitly the analogy between human devices and natural phenomena on which his design argument depends:

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> **T9** When we see something moved by contrivance (*machinatione*), like an orrery or clock or many other such things, we do not doubt that these things are the works of reason. When therefore we see the heavens in motion with wondrous (*admirabili*) swiftness, bringing about with utmost regularity their seasonal changes and preserving completely the safety of all things, are we to doubt that these things come about not only through reason, but through excellent and divine reason?

> (Cicero, *ND* 2.97)

The remainder of the first part of the catalog (2.98–119) is similarly devoted to features of the cosmic order at the grand scale, considering in turn the regions dominated by each of the elements: earth, sea, air, and fire. Emphasis is placed on the variegated beauty to be found within each region, the ways in which each region supports life, and the ways in which the four elemental masses jointly contribute to a durable cosmic order.

In the second part of his catalog Balbus shifts attention to the terrestrial realm, which he treats at greater length; his main focus here is on living organisms (2.120 ff.). A direct antecedent to this part of the catalog is found in Xenophon's *Memorabilia of Socrates* 1.4, a text well-known to the Stoics.[48] Socrates there maintains that the gods deserve our honor and gratitude on account of the wise craftsmanship they have benevolently exercised in creating animals, especially humans. In support of this claim he argues that animals exhibit good design in that their limbs and organs are formed and arranged in a way that is useful to them. Balbus gathers on behalf of the Stoics similar observations about the useful parts of not only animals but also plants, and extends the discussion to include instinctual animal behaviors, through which various species are naturally equipped for the demands of their various ways of life. His discussion culminates, like Xenophon's, in a prolonged discussion of human beings as special beneficiaries of divine providence (see further §6).

Balbus's catalog of marvels eventually inspired a legion of similar arguments from design within the later tradition of natural theology. Since the arguments in that tradition typically conclude that God exists, it is worth pausing to notice that the primary function of the present argument in its context is not to establish the *existence* of God, for which the Stoics argue by appeal to human preconceptions (see §2). Rather, Balbus focuses attention on animals and plants alongside other salient artifact-like features of the cosmos as indications of the *providential character* of God's creative activity: that is to say, their design reveals God's exemplary rational agency, forming and executing a plan (as a craftsman does) to secure preferred objectives within the cosmic order. From a certain point of view, this is a distinction without a difference, since a largely self-contained argument (such as we find here) that the world is controlled by the wisdom of God is convertible with little difficulty into an argument for the existence of God as a wise controller of the world—which is exactly what happened in the later tradition. Nevertheless, we risk misunderstanding Balbus (and the Stoic view he is advancing) if we do not register that he clearly intends his analogical design argument to complement the
p. 281 theological account he has already offered: crucially, the argument's conclusion that ↳ divine providence has produced the present cosmic order attaches to the identification of God as the nature of the cosmic animal (see §3–§4).[49]

Also noteworthy is the special interest Stoics show in cases where one part of the cosmos displays an essential purpose or function that it evidently could not have had, absent a corresponding function or purpose in some other and quite distinct part of the cosmos. This interest is indeed the main focus of the later Stoic Epictetus in his own argument for divine providence (*Discourses* 1.6). Epictetus considers the examples of colors, eyes, and light. He argues that if any of these three features of the world had failed to exist, the others would be futile; this proves, he claims, that all three are products of divine design. He goes on to draw an analogy between this triad of natural phenomena and a pair of artifacts, a sword and its scabbard. We can appreciate that this latter pair must have been made by a craftsman, Epictetus suggests, by considering them together: they are formed *for each other*, the sword made to fit the scabbard and vice versa (1.6.7). And this is sufficient evidence, he claims, that they were jointly designed by a craftsman. Just so with the case of color, eyes, and light; their coordinated functions are evidence of God's craftsmanship. Epictetus recommends in general the cultivation of an "ability to take a comprehensive view" (*dunamis sunoratikê*, 1.6.1) of natural phenomena, as a means to gaining a better appreciation of divine providence.

Cicero's Balbus offers some examples from the animal kingdom, probably deriving from the early Stoics, that plausibly illustrate the "comprehensive view" described by Epictetus. Consider the case of the *platalea*, or European spoonbill, which Balbus devotes more space to describing than any other species of mortal animal

(besides human beings). He relates two facts about this creature. First, it does not hunt its own food. Rather, it follows other sea-birds who dive for fish. When those birds have made a successful catch, the spoonbill swoops in and pecks them on the head, causing them to drop the fish, which the spoonbill then steals for itself. And second, once the spoonbill is full, it vomits forth the entire contents of its stomach, picking out and re-ingesting only the choicest bits (*ND* 2.124).

Why does Balbus regard this nasty and wasteful bird as a banner example of divine providence? The answer, I suggest, lies in the fact that the spoonbill's natural way of life reflects not only its own nature but also the natures of the other sea-birds on whom it depends. The latter are so constituted as to obtain routinely more fish than they need to consume themselves, while the spoonbill is constituted so as to relieve them of their excess catch. For a spoonbill to succeed in its natural functioning requires not just the resources provided in its own nature, but also that other sorts of bird have the right natures already in place (as it were). These species are teleologically coordinated, a fact that can be appreciated only by considering them together.[50]

We can see why the Stoics may have considered such examples to be philosophically significant: they exhibit a way in which divine craftsmanship aims at the common or comprehensive welfare of the world, a way that would escape notice if our attention were confined to the providential endowments of the world's various component parts (large and small) considered individually. In cases where separate and distinct parts of the
p. 282 cosmos contribute to the organization of the whole by mutually enabling and serving ↳ one another's ends, the Stoics see God's hand at work, coordinating a providential ecology.

6. Divine Providence, Humans, and the Good

Because the Stoics take God to be a rational animal, psychological and ethical facts true of human beings qua rational animals will be true of God as well. This means, as we have already seen (§4), that God has the power of rational impulse. It also means that God's virtue, like human virtue, consists solely in the wise regulation of his impulses; and that God's good, like the human good, depends solely on his possession of virtue.

Recently some scholars have leveraged these points in support of the surprising further claim that God, in providentially ordering the world, does not thereby achieve something *good*. Why think this? In the human case, impulses are commonly directed toward external objectives: for example, bodily health, wealth, and social reputation. These external objectives are in themselves on the Stoic account neither good nor bad, for their attainment (or non-attainment) cannot contribute to (or detract from) the agent's good, which consists solely in virtue and virtuous action; rather, they are indifferent. Now, as we have seen (§4–§5), God in establishing the cosmic order aims at certain providential objectives—viz. beauty, utility, and durability. If (as these scholars suggest) we are to treat the divine objectives achieved in the cosmic order as directly analogous to health, wealth, etc. in the human case, then they are evidently indifferents whose attainment contributes nothing to divine virtue.[51]

It is doubtful whether the Stoics would endorse the analogy on which this claim depends. To do so would require them to take the objectives of divine providence to be external to God's agency similarly to the way that the objectives of human action are typically external to human rational agency. There is however a general reason to think that they did not hold such a view. Recall that the Stoics maintain that every physical body within the cosmos is constituted from matter by the motions of the stretch of *pneuma* that pervades it, motions that moreover comprehensively determine the qualities that each body possesses and the processes that it undergoes. And these motions are in the final analysis rational actions caused by impulses formed in the divine mind.[52] By their own lights, then, the Stoics have plausible grounds for taking the cosmic order to be intrinsic to divine action, not some further (and so separately evaluable) product or result aimed at in divine action.

If this is correct, then it is indeed good that matter is qualified and arranged as it is—i.e., as divine providence ordains.[53] Such a view is both consistent with Stoic ethical theory and firmly grounded in Stoic physics: God, whose agency comprises the entire cosmos, *enacts* the cosmic order. And God's *actions*, like those of a virtuous
p. 283 human agent, must be goods, participating in the goodness of God's fully rational disposition. ↳ Since the beauty and utility and so forth exhibited within our cosmos will supervene on God's own impulses and actions, it is plausible to suppose that goodness supervenes on them as well.

Setting this point aside, let us turn to an important Stoic view concerning the overall purpose of the cosmic order: the well-attested claim that our cosmos is ordered for the sake of the rational beings in it, namely gods and humans.[54] This claim implies that divine provisions for cosmic order are in their content aimed (at least in part) specifically at the benefit of rational animals *other* than the cosmic animal. Our cosmos is evidently designed to be a place where a *community* of wise and virtuous beings can flourish together.[55] And the Stoics think that such a community is indeed present in the cosmos: for the etherial heavens are home to countless celestial deities.[56]

As it turns out, however, the Stoics think that very many of God's provisions for the cosmos are made specifically for the sake of human beings, most of whom, being less than fully rational, are not virtuous. Balbus is expansive in his enumeration of the special advantages that humans enjoy. These include not only the benefits of our human nature, both bodily (2.134–46) and especially mental (2.147–53), but features of the environment around us. Many plants and animals were given the form they have so as to be useful to humans: Balbus relates, as an example, Chrysippus's notorious claim that the souls of pigs serve a function analogous to salt—namely, to preserve pork for humans until we are ready to eat it (2.160). The Nile floods in order to make agriculture easier in Egypt (2.130); useful minerals and metals were placed in the earth for human convenience (2.162); and so forth. Even the motions of celestial bodies are calibrated so as to allow humans to measure the passage of the seasons (2.155).[57]

With so many of the basic features of the world arranged expressly for the use of humans, one might be tempted to call the Stoic cosmic order anthropocentric. It is however more accurate to say that humans play a special role in the cosmic economy:

> **T10** Chrysippus says that … all things except the cosmos are generated for the sake of other things. Thus the fruits and grains that the earth produces are for the sake of animals. And [other] animals are for the sake of humans: so [e.g.] horses are for riding, oxen for ploughing, and dogs for hunting and guarding; but humans themselves are born for the sake of contemplating and imitating the cosmos (*ad mundum contemplandum et imitandum*).
>
> (Cicero, *ND* 2.37)

Compare Epictetus's similar remarks in his essay on divine providence (the earlier part of which was discussed in §5):

> **T11** God has constituted each [animal] according to its intended purpose, one to be eaten, another to be used in the fields, another to produce cheese … But God has brought the human race into the world to be a spectator of himself and his works—and to be not merely a spectator but also an interpreter (*exêgêtên*) of them.
>
> (Epictetus, 1.6.18–19, trans. modified from Hard)

p. 284 Chrysippus's claim in **T10** that humans fulfill their nature by coming to both know and "imitate" the cosmos implies that the cosmos in some way provides a conspicuous *model* for human behavior.[58] Epictetus reflects this Chrysippean line of thought in **T11**, claiming similarly that humans have a purpose that is fulfilled by contemplating the cosmos—and, he further suggests, by "interpreting" it. Probably the latter idea is that the

human function is to give philosophical articulation to the work of divine reason that we observe in the cosmos, and to live in light of that articulation, thereby becoming ourselves wise and virtuous.[59] A human life, so lived, will in turn fulfill in part a goal that God was aiming at all along in establishing the cosmic order: a community of wise beings.[60]

7. Problems and Legacies

Nothing happens, according to the Stoics, except through God's activity; and nothing can resist or impede God's activity. As we have seen, on their account this divine activity is the implementation of a comprehensive plan for the development of the physical world. This implementation is accurately described as the world's common nature or the world's administration, depending on whether it is being considered as it were from below (in relation to the parts of the cosmos) or above (in relation to God). This nature or administration is providential in that it effects God's deliberative priorities—beauty, utility, and durability; and humans play a special role in it as (potential) members of the community of virtuous beings within the cosmos.

These theoretical commitments forced the Stoics to confront two questions that have since been of perennial interest to philosophers and theologians. First, if all things occur precisely as God has ordained them to occur —and so could not occur in any other way—what about human choices and actions? And second, if the world is designed to be optimally well-ordered (beautiful and useful), why does it contain so much that is apparently ugly and harmful—and why in particular is there so much wickedness among humans? These questions are direct precursors to what have come to be known, respectively, as the "problem of free will" and the "problem of evil."

The first problem arises for the Stoics in the context of their doctrine that all things happen in accordance with fate. For present purposes, the important point about this doctrine is that it is motivated by theological considerations: divine providence brooks no departure from its fixed agenda, and so is correctly characterized as "fate" to capture the inexorability of the series of causes that bring about all events.[61] The Stoics thus embraced causal determinism with a certain enthusiasm.[62] This stance in turn required that they explain how human beings can be morally responsible for their (fated) actions. The strategy they pursued was the original version of compatibilism, the view that humans can be morally responsible for their actions even if those actions are in fact always predetermined: a needle that many philosophers have since tried to thread, in the Stoics' footsteps.[63]

p. 285 The second problem besets, to some degree, any view on which the world was formed by a benevolent deity. To take a particularly relevant example, Plato in the *Timaeus* argues that our cosmos is the work of a divine craftsman (the Demiurge) who wants it to be optimally well-ordered, a view that influenced the early Stoics.[64] But Plato characterizes the stuff from which the world is made as recalcitrant, with tendencies of its own (cf. *Timaeus* 52d–53c), which limits what the Demiurge can ultimately do with it. And so, Plato has the option to blame the divine craftsman's material for observed deficiencies in the cosmos. The Stoics, who posit matter to be completely passive and pliable, without intrinsic qualities, have no analogous move available; if the cosmos is in fact not optimally well-ordered, this must be due to a failing of divine design itself, which they take to be impossible. They thus come under urgent pressure to show that any apparent defects in the cosmic order are *merely* apparent, or else that they are necessary and inescapable *side-effects* of God's optimal design. The Stoics were forced by their own theology to become pioneers in the field of theodicy.[65]

In conclusion, we have seen in Stoicism two main lines of thought about God. One—Stoic "theology" proper—establishes the existence and character of God on the basis of commitments that are peculiar to Stoic physics. The second, Stoic providentialism, uses an argument from design to confirm and articulate God's wise concern for the welfare of the world. The latter sort of argument can be used to draw conclusions about deities conceived along non-Stoic lines as well (for example, the God of the Abrahamic religions). From this point of

view, it is unsurprising that, although the theology of the Stoics languished after antiquity, their providentialism survived and thrived; and the problems that the latter entails remain live issues.[66]

Notes

1. DL 7.132 (LS 43B); cf. Chrysippus *ap.* Plutarch *Stoic. Rep.* 1035A (LS 26C). General studies of Stoic theology include Dragona-Monachou 1976, Mansfeld 1999, Algra 2003, and Meijer 2007; Collette 2022 is a wide-ranging survey of Stoic views on divine providence.

2. For recent discussion (and contrasting interpretations) of Stoic physicalism, see Bailey 2014, Bronowski 2019, de Harven 2022, and Ierodiakonou, this volume.

3. Certain constituent parts of the cosmos, in particular celestial bodies, are gods (see note 36); on the gods of mythology, see note 6.

4. Translations from Cicero are my own; the rest are modified from LS unless noted otherwise.

5. For differing perspectives on Plato's influence on early Stoic theology, see Reydams-Schils 1999: 41–83, Sedley 2002, Ademollo 2012, and Powers 2013.

6. The early Stoics were interested in the allegorical interpretation of Greek mythology, with a particular focus by Chrysippus on philosophical truths supposedly recoverable, through etymology, from the traditional *names* of the gods; on the practice, see Long 1996 and Gourinat 2005. Cornutus's *Greek Theology* is a surviving later example of Stoic allegoresis in this vein (see Boys-Stones 2018); evidence for earlier Stoics is usefully assembled with commentary in Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004: 79–145. On the complicated topic of Stoic stances toward traditional worship and traditional artistic representations of deities, see Algra 2007: 32–42, Algra 2009, and (with reference to later Stoicism) Pià Comella 2014.

p. 286 7. E.g., DL 7.135 (LS 46B); Cleanthes's *Hymn to Zeus* (LS 54I), on which see Thom 2005; Chrysippus at *SVF* 2.937 and 1076. I shall refer occasionally to the Stoic God as "he," which both reflects this practice and captures "his" personhood, but Stoic divinities have no intrinsic gender: *SVF* 2.1076.

8. The Chrysippean account of active *pneuma* and passive material elements is a working-out, at the physical level, of the Stoics' fundamental metaphysical commitment to two principles, active and passive, the former of which they identify as divine reason (*logos*) or god (*theos*) and the latter as matter (*hulê*). (For discussion, see M. Frede 2005; also see Ierodiakonou, this volume.) It is worth emphasizing that on Chrysippus's view the active principle is *always* pervading matter and acting on it so as to constitute the totality of body as a *rational animal*, viz. God. This is true even when the present cosmic order (and the elements that compose it) come to an end; see further note 36. On the Stoic theory of *pneuma*, see further Tieleman 2014, Hensley 2020, Helle 2021, and Piazzalunga 2023.

9. *SVF* 1.171; cf. *SVF* 2.1133, 1134.

10. On *spermatikoi logoi*, see Hahm 1977: 75–6, Ademollo 2020: 136–44, Boys-Stones 2021: 169 ff., and §4.

11. For further commentary on this text, see Long 2018: 439–44.

12. I favor the hypothesis of a single main source, but the point is not crucial; for if the speech incorporates material from a number of sources, those sources evidently shared a similar perspective. For a survey of views on Cicero's source(s), see Pease 1955–58: 45–8; see Wynne 2019: 18–28 for discussion.

13. This text is also commonly referred to as *Contra Mathematicos [M]* Book 9. Note that Sextus frames, arranges, and adapts his Stoic material to suit his own skeptical project. In this chapter, I shall indicate (in the endnotes) parallels of particular significance between Cicero and other ancient sources, including Sextus *M* 9.

14. This is not to suggest that the contents of Balbus's speech would map precisely onto any of the particular (lost) Hellenistic Stoic theological writings known to us (on which see the overview in Algra 2003: 153–4), but rather that the speech preserves a genuine and indeed probably typical Stoic perspective on the subject; see esp. note 15, note 25, note 27, note 31, note 46, and note 49.

15. For an echo of this division, see Seneca *Ep.* 95.50.

16. Cf. the discussion in D. Frede 2002: 103–5.

17. See note 6 and note 36.

18. Note the precision of Cicero's Latin, which clearly refers (with *praesensio* and *notione … praesentiamus*) specifically to *pre*conceptions/*prolêpseis*. In other works (e.g., *Luc.* 30) he does not consistently mark a terminological distinction between these and conceptions/*ennoiai* (for the distinction, see Caston, this volume; cf. note 21). Also note that *certa notione* … might instead be translated "a preconception of which we are certain"; but the difference in emphasis this would imply does not affect my remarks here.

19. This interpretation owes much to Schofield 1980.

20. Aëtius 4.11.1–4 (*SVF* 2.83, LS 39E); cf. Cicero, *Luc.* 2.30 (LS 40N). On preconceptions in Stoicism, see Brittain 2005: 166–85 and Fine 2014: 258–67.

21. Chrysippus treats preconceptions, alongside cognitive impressions (*phantasiai katalêptikai*), as criteria of truth: DL 7.54 (= LS 40A, *SVF* 2.105). On these criteria, see Caston, this volume. A preconception once "articulated" becomes a conception
p. 287 (*ennoia*) in the narrow sense (see Gourinat 2000: 46–51 and Brittain 2005: 181–3); human rationality is ↳ defined by Chrysippus as a collection (*athroisma*) of such conceptions and preconceptions (*SVF* 2.841; cf. *SVF* 1.149 and 2.83/LS 39E; for comment, see M. Frede 1994).

22. Brittain 2005: 183, note 69 correctly points out, against Schofield 1980: 302–4 (for the view cf. Dragona-Monachou 1976: 43–5), that it is not *part* of the preconception of god that gods exist. The preconception is of a thing that is of such-and-such a sort (alive, powerful, intelligent, etc.; cf. **T1**, **T4**, and Plutarch *St. rep.* 1051F = *SVF* 3. Antipater 33). Nevertheless, the Stoics, having asserted there to be a common human preconception of god (cf. note 23), take it to be *evident* that one or more gods exist: for by their lights to possess a preconception is to register, as part of the furniture of reality, some thing(s) bearing such-and-such properties as are given in the preconception.

23. A difference between on one hand the preconception "god" and on the other "sunflower" is that the former is said by the Stoics to be a "common" (*koinê*) conception (*SVF* 2.337). (Another Stoic example of a common conception is "blending"/*mixis*: *SVF* 2.473.) I take it this label does not indicate a difference in epistemic value among preconceptions, all of which are formed naturally and serve as criteria of truth (see note 21). Rather it reflects the fact that while the acquisition of certain preconceptions depends on being raised in particular locations or circumstances—e.g., someone growing up in Florida may get the preconception "alligator," but someone raised in Iceland may not—there is a set of conceptions (like "god," "blending") that humans *all* naturally get from the *common experience* of living in this cosmos. For this reason, the conception "god," although it is (as we have seen) empirically acquired, is sometimes also said by the Stoics to be "innate" or "implanted" in all humans (Cicero *ND* 2.12: cf. Seneca quoted in note 27, and Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 12.39). On the difficult (and, I take it, separate) question whether there is a further and special sense in which the Stoics take certain *ethical* conceptions to be innate to humans, see recent discussion in Scott 1988; Jackson-McCabe 2004; Dyson 2009; and Fine 2014: 275–83.

24. To take a particularly relevant example, the Stoics complain that Epicureans go against the preconception of god when they—in line with their other, and in the Stoic view misguided, physical and ethical commitments—characterize the gods as tranquilly inactive and so not providential. (Cf. Plutarch *St. rep.* 1051D–E and *Com. not.* 1075E. For a colorful riposte, see *ND* 1.51–4, where an Epicurean says that the Stoic God is "quite overworked" [*laboriosissimus*, 52]. For discussion of the merits of this charge, see Bénatouïl 2009.) On Epicurean theology, see Verde, this volume.

25. On Stoic claims about the causes of the preconception of god, see also *SVF* 2.1009; cf. Sextus *M* 9.26–8, Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 12.27–35 and 39, and *SVF* 2.1010.

26. Cleanthes also appealed, Balbus reports, to the practice (successful, as the Stoics supposed) of divination, the Stoic theory of which Cicero presents in *De divinatione*, his sequel to *ND*.

27. There is reason to think this opening move in Balbus's speech is typical of Stoic theology. Suggestively, Antipater's treatise *On the Gods*, whose opening lines survive (*SVF* 3. Antipater 33), also begins with consideration of the preconception of god. Seneca (*Ep.* 117.6) indicates that "we Stoics" argue for the existence of gods in part on the basis of there being a "preconception" (*praesumptio*) or "implanted notion" (*insita … opinio*) of god among all humans; cf. Sextus M 9.199 (<*SVF*

2.337). And in *ND* 3 Cicero's Academic spokesman Cotta, after refuting Balbus's claim that the existence of gods is self-evident (*perspicuum*: 3.10 and 11) on the basis of common human experience, takes himself *thereby* to have addressed
p. 288 the Stoic case for the existence of gods (*ND* 3.20; the other arguments of ↳ Balbus's section (A) are deferred by Cotta for consideration under the headings of divine nature and divine providence).

28. For example, the heavenly motions are of such grand scale and enduring regularity that, it is urged, they evince the agenda of a superhuman (and so divine) power and intelligence. And since many regular physical processes on Earth occur in unison with celestial motions, we should conceive of this power as operating not only in the heavens but throughout the cosmos, pervading it and unifying its various parts into a system. (On this phenomenon of cosmic "sympathy," see Meyer, this volume.) Finally, a string of syllogistic arguments (credited to the Stoic founder Zeno) offer two lines of support for the claim that this intelligent power should be attributed to the cosmos itself. The first line of thought depends on the claim "Nothing is better than the cosmos." Since to be rational and wise and alive are unqualifiedly better than their contraries, it follows that the cosmos is itself a rational (and wise) animal, and so a candidate for divinity. The second line of thought takes it as granted that the entire cosmos is an organic unity: since it produces parts that are rational, we may infer, again, that the cosmos as a whole is a rational animal. These arguments are quite interesting in their own right; see Schofield 1983, Mansfeld 1999: 457–9, and Gelinas 2006: 54–66, all of whom discuss this passage in *ND* with reference to parallel material in Sextus Empiricus. For our purposes, it is important to note that while Balbus here sketches a picture of the Stoic God in outline, the picture is—thus far—largely unsubstantiated. For example, the claim that nothing is better than the cosmos is unsupported; and it is not clear on what basis we are to infer the rationality of the whole cosmos—even if conceived, for the sake of argument, as an organism—from the rationality of some of its parts. (From the fact that Mary's hands have ten fingers we can infer that Mary herself is ten-fingered; but of course, she is ten-fingered only in virtue of her hands. Similarly, we might worry that Zeno's arguments on their own show —at best—that the cosmos is "rational" just in virtue of having some parts [e.g., humans] that are rational.) These points are addressed by the "physical" arguments Balbus goes on to offer; see §3.

29. Balbus expresses himself with precision on this point (2.23): these will be arguments *a rationibus physicis, id est naturalibus*.

30. "Partial" because Balbus leaves out inanimate objects; as we shall see, he first argues that the cosmos is alive in *some* sense, which is then treated as a settled point. On the *scala naturae*, see Inwood 1985: 17–26; and cf. Tsouni, this volume.

31. Cicero's Balbus offers a second argument for this claim at *ND* 2.83–5 (cf. note 49). The later Stoic Cleomedes argues on partly similar grounds that the cosmos has a nature/*phusis* (1.11–16). And Sextus preserves another Stoic argument for the same claim, offered as an intermediate step toward proving the cosmos is divine (*M* 9.78–85, a passage that bears general comparison, along with 9.111–14 and 119–22, to Balbus's "physical" arguments).

32. On this passage, see Boyancé 1962 and Solmsen 1968.

33. See Powers 2012 for a full analysis of the argument (with more extensive references to parallel material in Sextus *M* 9).

34. For early Stoic disagreement over where precisely in the heavens the cosmic *hêgemonikon* is located, see Diogenes Laertius 7.139.

35. This view is Chrysippean; see **T6**, and cf. *SVF* 2.935.

36. Celestial bodies are also gods, Balbus argues at 2.39–44 (offering further remarks on the subject in an anti-Epicurean digression at 2.47–56). Note that these celestial gods are not unrestrictedly "immortal": they live as long as the cosmic
p. 289 order endures, as part of that ↳ order, but perish in the fiery conflagration (*ekpurôsis*) that ends that order (*SVF* 2.1049). Only God survives the conflagration and so is unqualifiedly immortal, on Chrysippus's account: for all that exists in the conflagration is God's rational ruling part, from which the cosmic order (i.e., God with a differentiated organic body) is generated anew (LS 46E, F, H = *SVF* 2.604, 605, 1052). The Stoics acknowledge a broader usage of the term *kosmos* that encompasses not only our world-order but also the conflagration (LS 44F = *SVF* 2.526); these are alternating phases in the life of God, the "cosmic" animal who retains his identity across both phases. On the conflagration, see the seminal study of Mansfeld 1979; for a different perspective, cf. Salles, this volume.

37. I translate "its reason" for the Greek singular *logon*, where Long and Sedley translate the word as if it were plural ("its reasons"). Note that my translation leaves open the possibility that Chrysippus is here referring to the cosmos's *faculty* of reason—i.e., its power of rational impulse, on which see §4.

38. See note 9.

39. On impulse as a motion in the soul's ruling part, see LS 53P and Q. Both Epictetus (4.1.100) and Marcus Aurelius (4.40, 6.36, 7.75, 9.28), presumably like Cicero following the early Stoic view, attribute the power of impulse to the divine mind and associate this power with God's ordering of the world; cf. note 42.

40. On impulse and action, see Klein, this volume.

41. Are the Stoics "pantheists" or "theists"? Arguably, the former insofar as they take all the world to be divine, and the latter insofar as their God is a particular person. I suggest there is no fundamental tension here, for the Stoic proposal is precisely that the whole cosmos is a wise agent (so a "person"). But since the Stoics identify the cosmos as divine *on the grounds that* it is such an agent, theirs is a pantheism that presupposes theism. (This question was first brought into focus by Bonhöffer [1894: 243–9]; for recent debate, see Long [2002: 142–56] and Algra 2007; cf. Baltzly 2003.)

42. For the thought, cf. Marcus Aurelius 9.1.5, where the impulse (*hormê*) of divine providence is described as resulting in the ordering of the world (*diakosmêsis*) by way of the presence in cosmic nature of "certain *logoi* of things-to-be" and the allocation of "generative powers" (*dunameis gonimoi*) that bring those things about—an apparent elaboration of the notion of seminal reasonings (*spermatikoi logoi*). Cf. note 39.

43. Commentators have sometimes balked at Balbus's simultaneous comparison of the causes of the natural motions in the cosmos both to a seed *and* to the rational impulses of a human agent; e.g., Bobzien 2021: 244, note 88, who hypothesizes a lacuna in Cicero's text. But on the interpretation I suggest here, the double comparison accurately conveys the Stoic view. This interpretation also stands in contrast to accounts of the biological nature of the Stoic cosmos (for a recent example, see Salles 2021) that leave it unclear how such an organism could be—as the Stoics insist—designed and controlled by divine providence.

44. Cf. Plutarch *St. rep.* 1044D.

45. See Wynne 2012: 371–8 for further discussion of **T8**.

46. Balbus's speech is (so far as we can tell) in line with the normal Stoic approach in this respect. Seneca's *De Providentia* is primarily an exercise in theodicy, rather than a discussion of the doctrine of providence; however, at the outset (1.2–4) he indicates that a full account of providence would begin with an argument that the long-term stability of the cosmos, and the various regular physical processes that subtend that stability, must be the products of craft (*ars*) and reason (*ratio*) rather than chance. Cf. Epictetus 1.6.1–11 (on which see further in this chapter). Many Stoic examples of design in nature
p. 290 (including some of those ↳ reported by Cicero) make their way into ancient Christian literature on the subject—e.g., Theodoret *On Providence*, especially sermons 1–4.

47. For the thought, cf. Cleomedes 1.2.1ff.

48. On Xenophon's argument and its influence on the Stoics, see Sedley 2007: 78–86, 212–23 and Powers 2009.

49. Other surviving ancient versions of the Stoic design argument are broadly consistent with this intention, insofar as they tend either to be preliminary or heuristic in character (e.g., the appeal to apparent design in nature as a cause of the human preconception of god [see §2] and the analogies of ND 2.15 and 17–18 [cf. note 28]) or else to incorporate the appeal to evidence of apparent design in the world directly within an argument that the cosmos has a unified nature (a *phusis*) responsible for the disposition of its parts—e.g., the lines of argument reported in Sextus *M* 9.111–18 and Cicero *ND* 2.81–90. (On the analogical aspect of the latter, see Hunter 2009.) Ironically, the fuller articulation of Stoic views in Balbus's speech at 2.91 ff. yields a statement of the design argument that, taken in isolation, loans itself to being repurposed in a way the Stoics did not intend—namely, to argue for the existence of a *transcendent* divine craftsman.

50. Cf. the case of the *pina* (2.123), a shellfish that lives in a symbiotic relationship with a particular species of shrimp (the example is known to have interested Chrysippus: *SVF* 2.729–30); and the cases of domesticated animals and plants (2.130), which are both of use to humans and naturally constituted so as to be unable to survive without human care. See also note 57.

51. Brennan 2005: 238–9 argues that the cosmic order, being an arrangement of indifferents, is no better or worse than any other possible such arrangement; Wynne 2012 goes slightly further, arguing that the Stoic cosmos considered as a whole is an indifferent artifact. What is important for present purposes is that both arguments explicitly rely on the assumption that God in ordering the world is in the position of selecting from among indifferent options in a manner analogous to a

human sage. Brennan suggests that just as human virtue "consists in our responding wisely and rationally to the indifferent things that we encounter," so too "Zeus's goodness consists in his maximally wise and rational arrangement of the indifferents that make up the cosmos as a whole" (Brennan 2005: 239; cf. Brennan 2003: 287, note 63); Wynne similarly says, "Being wise, [the Stoic God] will … share the sage's way of acting. When he crafts a product he will likely have selected indifferents in mind" (2012: 362; cf. 358, 365).

52. One plausible way of filling out this picture in physical terms, as suggested in §4, is that God's cosmos-ordering rational actions are the expressions of his "seminal reasonings."

53. For a similar perspective, see Graver 2007: 50; cf. M. Frede 1999: 75–7.

54. Cicero, *Fin.* 3.67 (attributed to Chrysippus), *ND* 2.133 and 2.154; cf. *SVF* 2.1157 and Posidonius at DL 7.138.

55. This view is foundational to Stoic political theory, according to which there is only one true state or *polis*: the cosmos itself, the citizens of which are gods and wise humans. See Schofield 1999: 57–92, Vogt 65–160, and Wildberger 2018: 51–69. Note that the presence of a community of the virtuous within the cosmos is on any account a good (*not* indifferent) aspect of the cosmic order.

56. On celestial gods, see note 36.

57. Notice that these claims and similar ones attributed to Chrysippus (cf. LS 54P), perhaps all deriving from his *On Nature* (cf.
p. 291 LS 54O), can be understood as special applications of the ↳ Stoic strategy (discussed in §5) of invoking observed teleological coordination as evidence of divine providence.

58. We find the thought echoed in Cicero *Fin.* 4.11, where it is suggested that the celestial motions model for humans the four cardinal virtues; cf. Cicero *ND* 2.153 and Posidonius fr. 186 Kidd.

59. Cf. Bénatouïl 2013: 149, 162.

60. Wynne acknowledges that a community of wise beings is a genuine good but infers—appealing to the widespread tendency to folly among humans (a perennially thorny issue for the Stoics)—that God does not aim to establish the whole cosmos as such a community (2012: 369–71). But divine providence assiduously promotes and encourages wisdom *throughout the whole cosmos*, disposing many features of the natural world so as to induce humans to full rationality and thus to cosmic citizenship; the fact that this process frequently goes awry tells us (I would suggest) more about the challenges faced by mortal rational animals on the path to wisdom than about God's aims.

61. For the identification of divine providence and cosmic nature with fate, see *SVF* 1.176 and 2.937; cf. LS 55M–N, and **T2** and **T6**. For a discussion of the fixity of divine volition in Stoicism (with special reference to evidence in Seneca), see Graver 2023: 362–6.

62. The Epicureans, by contrast, struggle to avoid being saddled by their own atomism with a blind, mechanical determinism; for discussion, see Warren, this volume.

63. On the doctrine of fate and Stoic compatibilism, see Bobzien 1998a and Meyer, this volume. On the complex early history of the problem of free will, see Bobzien 1998b and M. Frede 2011.

64. See my comments on **T1**.

65. For sources on theodicy in early Stoicism, see LS 54I and Q–U (with comments at vol. 1, 332–3); for a surviving later Stoic text, see Seneca's *De providentia*. For discussion of evil in Stoicism, see Long 1968, Kerferd 1978, D. Frede 2002, Bryan 2013, and Sellars 2019.

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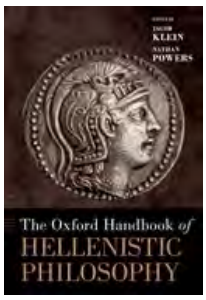
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CHAPTER

13 The Stoic Cosmos, from End to Beginning

Ricardo Salles

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Abstract

The present chapter deals with the destruction and the restoration of the cosmos in Stoic cosmology. Although the Stoic cosmos is similar to other geocentric systems in Antiquity, it is unique because it is periodically destroyed in a "conflagration" and then restored anew, in a cosmic cycle that is both endless and beginningless. This doctrine of everlasting recurrence is perhaps the most salient element of Stoic cosmology and, therefore, a theory that requires close scrutiny. The chapter describes the mechanism that leads to the conflagration and the cosmogony by which cosmic order is restored by the Stoic god. It pays special attention to the contribution of the individual early Stoics Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus to these two areas of Stoic cosmology.

Keywords: conflagration, cosmogony, cosmic cycle, Stoic god, cosmology, Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus

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Structurally, the Stoic cosmos is a spherical system surrounded by an infinite void and composed of three basic regions: the Earth at its center (composed of water and earth), the layer of air that surrounds the Earth and that constitutes its atmosphere, and the larger layer of fire that surrounds the atmosphere and constitutes the heavens. This outermost layer is inhabited by the planets, including the moon and the sun, and, further away, by the stars. The Stoics call celestial fire "ether" (*aithêr*). This is not a fifth element in addition to sublunary fire, air, water, and earth (as in Aristotle), but rather a rarefied type of fire. The moon marks off the limit between the Earth's atmospheric layer and the layer of ether. So, given the special nature and location of ether, the divide between the sublunary and the supralunary cosmos is an important one in Stoic cosmology.[1]

There are several significant similarities between the Stoic cosmos and other geocentric systems in antiquity, most notably, Plato's. For example, the Stoic cosmos is, like the Platonic one, a living intelligent being—i.e.,

something capable as a whole of entertaining its own thoughts. And it also is, like the Platonic cosmos (at least on a certain interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus*), a being created and providentially administered by a supremely rational god. However, there are important differences as well between the Stoic and the Platonic cosmos, and indeed between the Stoic cosmos and any other geocentric system in antiquity. The most salient difference—the focus of the present chapter—is that in Stoic cosmology the present cosmic order is periodically interrupted and restored. The interruption is due to a "conflagration" (*ekpurôsis*) that has its origin in the heavens. It occurs when celestial fire descends from the heavens, spreads out over the sublunary cosmos and burns it up completely. At this point, the whole cosmos becomes a large mass of fire that burns until all combustible matter is exhausted. Once the conflagration is over, a new cosmic order is birthed that is identical to the present one. This process is meant to be endless. For the new order is also bound to be destroyed by a conflagration, followed by a new cosmogony and so on *ad vitam aeternam*. In fact, this endless recurrence is
p. 296 also beginningless: it has been ongoing all along from eternity. ↳ The present cosmic order is nothing but the repetition of an identical one that has been periodically destroyed and restored infinitely many times in the past.

The present chapter is divided into three sections. The first (§1) deals with the conflagration and gives a detailed account of the physical process that leads up to it. The second (§2) describes the cosmogony by which, once the conflagration subsides, the cosmos is restored anew, with a focus on the earliest stages of the cosmogony and in particular on how the different regions of the cosmos are reconstituted from the extinction of the conflagration. Finally, the third section (§3) turns to Chrysippus, the third head of the Stoa in the late third century BCE, and the question of what exactly his contribution was to Stoic views about the cosmic cycle.

1. The Conflagration

There is abundant evidence that most major Stoics believed in the conflagration.[2] However, very few texts set out their reasons for holding this thesis and, worse still, no text describes in detail the mechanism by which the conflagration takes place. As we shall see, however, the two leading ideas are the following. (1) Throughout the present cosmic cycle, celestial bodies gradually consume all the water that exists in the cosmos. This water is located on Earth, the only place in the cosmos that contains water. (2) Once the Earth is totally dry it catches fire and is completely consumed by flames. Regarding (1), we know that the reason the Stoics think that the celestial bodies dehydrate the Earth is that (1a) celestial bodies are made of a fire that feeds on water. And we also have an account of how terrestrial water reaches the heavens to feed celestial bodies, something that requires an explanation given the large distance between the surface of the Earth and the heavens: (1b) water rises up in the form of an exhalation (*anathumiasis*) which is, strictly speaking, the food of celestial bodies. If we follow these theses, the mechanism that leads up to the conflagration is, in general terms, relatively simple. Terrestrial water, heated up by the fire of celestial bodies, emits exhalations; when these reach the heavens, they are gradually consumed by this fire; at that moment, celestial fire (i.e., ether) descends from the heavens and spreads out over the Earth and its atmosphere to consume them completely.

This theory has significant precedents in earlier cosmologies. For instance, the idea that the sea is gradually vaporizing by the action of the sun, and that it will keep on vaporizing until it dries out, together with the idea that this desiccation brings about a major disruption in the cosmic order, may be found in Anaximander (*DK* 12A27). In his cosmology, winds are the cause of the motion of celestial bodies, and their cause is the evaporation of the sea; therefore, the desiccation of the whole sea would eliminate winds and this would eliminate the motion of celestial bodies. And so, given that the motion of celestial bodies is constitutive of the present cosmic order, the desiccation of the whole sea will disrupt the present cosmic order; though the Stoic
p. 297 idea of a *conflagration*—understood as a fire that will consume the sublunary cosmos—is totally absent from ↳ Anaximander. The idea that celestial bodies feed on exhalations proceeding from the sublunary cosmos seems to go back, to some extent at least, to Heraclitus (*DK* 22A1.8–11 and A11), as does the thesis that the

cosmos as a whole is periodically consumed by fire (*DK* 22B30). But the crucial inferential connection, present in Stoic cosmology, that the cosmos is periodically consumed by fire *because* celestial bodies feed on sublunary exhalations is not attested for Heraclitus. In what follows, I focus on this inference: why exactly does the consumption of terrestrial water cause ether to descend to the sublunary cosmos?

To begin, some clarification is needed regarding (1b): what are the exhalations made of? And what is it that explains that they rise up into the sky? Regarding the first question, I intend to show, in general terms, that for the Stoics the exhalation from one material substance is made out of another material substance: an exhalation is the outcome of a process whereby (a) a body *X* is emitted by a body *Y* of which, prior to the emission, *X* was a part and (b) at the moment of the emission, *X* becomes materially different from *Y*. When these two conditions are met, the Stoics say that *X* is exhaled (*anathumiatai*) by *Y* or that *Y* exhales *X*. A consequence of this is that the exhalations that feed the celestial bodies, insofar as they are exhaled from terrestrial water, are *not* made of water. In particular, they should not be construed as masses of evaporated water that would consist in a large number of water particles suspended in the air, and that would rise up in the sky because their density would be similar to that of the air. In fact, this hypothesis is inadequate for two reasons. First, if an exhalation from terrestrial water were made of water, it would not be able to float in the air, let alone rise up in the sky, all by itself: for according to Stoic physics water is heavier than air and hence, even if the quantity of water within an exhalation were proportionally small, the exhalation would be heavier than a mass of dry air with exactly the same volume.[3] Second, even if an aggregate of water particles could float in the air, it could not rise up in the sky by the agency of winds that would push it upward. For according to Stoic meteorology, winds have their origin in the clouds.[4] Therefore, the winds that reach the surface of Earth blow downward, not upward as they would have to if they were able to push anything upward. Thus, we must suppose—as condition (ii) demands—that the exhalations that nourish ether are not made of water but of thin air. In consequence, there is a large difference between Stoic exhalations and the phenomenon of evaporation in modern physics. In modern physics, the evaporation of a body is a process in which the material substance of the body changes state—from liquid to gaseous—through the dispersion of molecules of the liquid into the surrounding gas. In this process, the original liquid is not transformed into another type of body (in particular, it is not transformed into the surrounding gas), but retains its identity at the level of particles. For instance, in the evaporation of a water puddle, the water changes from liquid to gas, but it persists as water at the level of molecules that disperse into the surrounding air. In Stoic physics, by contrast, in the exhalation of a body by another body a change of state may occur (a liquid may exhale a gas); but what is really essential is that, even if no change of state occurs, a material transformation of the original substance takes place.

That exhaled bodies and the bodies that exhale them differ materially from one another is evident from at least three different areas of Stoic physics: the theory of the generation of soul, the theory of cosmogony, and meteorology.[5] I will focus on evidence from the meteorology, and especially on a passage that deals explicitly with the material composition of the exhalations that nourish celestial bodies. The passage is from a section of Book 2 of Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* (*ND*) dealing with the divinity of these bodies (2.39–44). In this passage it is argued that celestial bodies are more intelligent than we are.

> **T1** (i) It may be appreciated that the wits of those who inhabit those regions in which the air is pure and thin are sharper and more suitable for intellection than [the wits] of those who live in a dense and heavy atmosphere. (ii) Indeed, they [*sc.* the Stoics] hold that the substance of the nourishment that you use has a certain influence on mental acuteness. (iii) Therefore it is likely that the intelligence in celestial bodies is superior, since, on the one hand, (iv) they inhabit the ethereal region of the cosmos and, on the other, (v) they feed on the vapours of the sea and the land rarefied by the long distance [that separates them].[6]
>
> (Cicero, *ND* 2.42–3)

The structure of the argument is relatively clear. There is an explanatory connection between claims (i) and (ii): the wits of beings who live in regions whose air is pure and thin are sharper than those of beings who live in regions whose air is dense and heavy *because* the beings who live in a given region are nourished by the air of that region, and the mental acuteness of a being depends on the density of the air that it consumes: the purer and thinner it is, the more mentally acute the being is. Therefore, in (iii) the conclusion is drawn that celestial bodies are more intelligent than we are. The inference from the premisses to the conclusion is secured by (iv) and (v): given that celestial bodies feed on sublunary exhalations (*umores*), celestial bodies have to be more intelligent than we are.

It is plain that one assumption in the argument is the thesis we are interested in: the exhalations that feed celestial bodies are purer and thinner than any air available to human beings, which entails that these exhalations are not made of water. If they were, the nourishment of celestial bodies would not be purer and thinner, but rather much denser, than the air that we breathe. Thus, **T1** is good evidence that according to the Stoics the exhalations that nourish celestial bodies are not made of water but of air and, more generally, that in the meteorological processes of exhalation, the body exhaled is materially different from the exhaling body.[7]

It is worth noticing that, according to **T1**, the thinness of the air that constitutes these exhalations is due to the fact that they were rarefied in their long upward travel. The text does not explain why this travel implies rarefaction, but one possibility is that, in the course of their upward motion, the exhalations are exposed to increasingly intense heat radiated from the ether. On this view, the role of ether in the phenomenon of exhalation is twofold. First, it heats up terrestrial water and brings about the formation of exhalations. Second,
p. 299 it heats up the exhalations themselves, which gradually expand ↳ and become increasingly sparse, which determines their ascent to the heavens. Thus, if they find no meteorological obstacles that cool them down and force them to descend, they travel upward until they reach the heavens. And they achieve their highest degree of sparsity when they finally reach the celestial bodies that have drawn them upward and will consume them. This explanation is a possible, though conjectural, answer to the question of why Stoic exhalations rise into the sky.

We may now return to the conflagration and describe as follows the mechanism that leads to it. Throughout the duration of the cosmic order, an uninterrupted process of exhalations takes place in which the water located on Earth—either in the form of seas, rivers, and other bodies of water or simply in the form of humidity in the soil—is transformed into air, and in which this air is gradually thinned and moves upward until it reaches the supralunary cosmos and is consumed by ether. Thus, there is all along a flow of air continuously rising from Earth in the direction of the heavens. Given that the material for this flow is supplied by terrestrial water, the process of exhalation gradually uses up all terrestrial water. When it is totally consumed, the airflow stops. At that point, celestial fire gradually descends from the heavens to consume, first of all, the layer of atmospheric air, now stationary, that separates the heavens from the Earth and, second, once it reaches its surface, all the remaining bodies and the Earth as a whole.

We now have a better idea why the conflagration begins when terrestrial water is consumed. This process of dehydration implies the eventual termination of the upward flow of exhalations, which brings about the descent of celestial fire to the atmosphere and ultimately to the surface of Earth. Cicero also gives a good description of this mechanism in Book 2 of *ND*.

> **T2** But celestial bodies are fiery by nature, which is why they feed on those vapours of the earth, the sea and the [fresh] waters (*maris, aquarum*) that ascend, by the agency of the sun, from the fields and out of the waters; and when they are nourished and renewed by them, the celestial bodies and the whole ether shed them back again and then once more draw them up from the same place, so that nothing is destroyed or only the extremely small portion that the fire of the celestial bodies and the flame of the ether consume.[8] From this, the members of our school conclude that the events which they said that Panaetius put into question will actually occur, so that the whole cosmos will burn

> when, once moisture is consumed, the earth will not be able to be nourished, and the air—whose ascent (*ortus*) cannot take place if water is exhausted—will not be able to flow. Thus, nothing will remain but fire, by which, given that it is animate and is god, the restoration of the cosmos will take place and the same order will arise.
>
> (Cicero, *ND* 2.118 [*SVF* 2.593, *BS* 18.2])

As Cicero brings out, there is an explanatory connection between the exhaustion of terrestrial water, the end of the ascending air flow, and the onset of the conflagration. The passage highlights an important fact that I have not mentioned earlier: in normal circumstances, no exhalation is totally consumed by celestial fire, and some
p. 300 of it travels back to the surface of the Earth in the form of rain. But one part of it ↳ is consumed by celestial fire and, therefore, one part of the water that was used to produce it in the first place is lost. In consequence, it is necessary that the sublunary cosmos gradually dries out and that the time comes when the Earth is no longer able to emit exhalations. The termination of the ascending airflow that prevented celestial fire from descending—the *ortus* to which Cicero refers—marks the beginning of the conflagration. [9]

2. The Cosmogony

For the Stoics, cosmogony is the process by which cosmic order is fully restored once the conflagration is at an end. Their theory envisages a sequence of at least three different stages. In the first stage, (a), the four elements —fire, air, water, and earth—are regenerated. In the second stage, (b), complex homogeneous bodies—gold, flesh, wood, and the like—are created out of the simple ones by mixture; and in the third stage, (c), heterogeneous bodies—e.g., animals and plants—are created by the assemblage of complex homogeneous bodies. Moreover, the cosmic order restored through the cosmogony is fully type-identical to that which perished in the conflagration: even individual persons—you and I—will exist again an infinite number of times, once at each cosmic cycle, and live again the life that we have in the present cycle.

In what follows, I leave aside (b) and (c); I shall return briefly to the topic of everlasting recurrence at the end.[10] In the case of (a), there are two different accounts to consider here: that of Zeno, the founder and first head of the Stoic school, and that of Cleanthes, his successor, who departs from Zeno in significant respects. The main evidence for Zeno's version is a report from Stobaeus.

> **T3** And Zeno explicitly argues as follows: it will be necessary that the ordering of the cosmos out of substance that takes place periodically be such that, whenever a change of fire into water occurs through air, one part of it is solidified and becomes earth. Of the remainder, one part stays as water, and from the evaporation of the other part, air is generated and, when air is rarefied, fire is ignited.[11]
>
> (Stobaeus, *Anthologium* 152, 19–153, 6 [*SVF* 1.102; *BS* 15.5])

In order fully to understand this text, we need to bear in mind what occurs in the very final stages of the conflagration. The fire of the conflagration is extinguished when the flames that consume the cosmos run out of fuel and die, and when the mass of heat that is left behind as a result of this extinction gradually cools down and is transformed first into air and then into water. At that point, the cosmogony begins and the other elements are generated. One important idea in this account is that the fire of the conflagration is *wholly* transformed into air and water. None of it remains at the start of the cosmogony. This is strongly implied in a passage parallel to **T3**.

p. 301
> **T4** [They also say that] god, intelligence, fate, and Zeus are all one, and many other names are applied to him. In the beginning all by itself he turned the entire substance through air into water. Just as the sperm is enveloped in the seminal fluid, so god, who is the seminal principle of the cosmos, stays

> behind as such in the moisture, making matter serviceable to himself for the successive stages of creation. He then creates first of all the four elements, fire, water, air, earth. They are referred to by Zeno in *On the Whole* and Chrysippus in the first part of the *Physics*, and by Archedemus in a treatise *On the Elements*.
>
> (*DL* 7.135–6 [*SVF* 1.102 & 2.580; LS 46B])

The substance in question must be the fire of the conflagration. The *whole* of it—"the entire substance"—is transformed into air and water, and this transformation marks the beginning of the cosmogony. Also noteworthy is the claim in **T4** that the Stoic god is present in cosmogonic water as the "seminal principle of the cosmos" (*spermatikos logos tou kosmou*). This claim is an application to cosmology of a key biological concept in Stoicism: the notion of seminal principles. This is not the place to consider this concept in detail, but in outline, it applies to any natural being, including the cosmos as a whole, that originates in and evolves from a seed (*sperma*).[12] The seminal principles of any such being are the principles that guide its development from its beginning as a seed. For example, in ordinary ontogenesis, the seminal principles of a human being, Jane, are the principles that determine her development from a *sperma* (which would be the individual spermatozoon-ovum in modern biology) into a specific *embryo* in her mother's womb, then into a particular *infant* and ultimately into Jane herself.[13]

One puzzling idea in Zeno's theory of cosmogony is that, once the whole of substance becomes water, the four elements are generated first. But how can water itself, the element, be "generated" out of the initial mass of water? Either the element water is generated out of a body that is not water, in which case we do not know what this body is and why it is called "water," or the element water is "generated" out of something that is literally water, in which case there does not seem to be any generation at all. Modern scholars have tended to deal with this dilemma by accepting some version of the first horn, suggesting, e.g., that the "water" or "moisture" mentioned in the first part of **T4** is not elemental water but rather some analogously passive stuff that the Stoic god subsequently forms into the elemental bodies.[14] However, we might also try to tackle the dilemma by addressing its *second* horn. For example, one could argue that the term "water" in "fire, water, air, earth" in the next-to-last sentence of **T4** refers, not to a newly generated and materially different substance that did not exist at an earlier stage of the cosmogony, but rather to an additional *mass* of literal water, namely, to the mass of water that is created by division of the mass of water that existed at the start of the cosmogony. The two masses are both made of ordinary water—they are the same kind of substance—but they are not the same *mass*. On this account, the generation of water mentioned in **T4** is simply the establishment (by division) of a new quantity of water.[15]

Another puzzling component in Zeno's theory is the very idea that the fire of the conflagration is completely
p. 302 extinguished before the start of the cosmogony. How is this ↳ claim compatible with the thesis—also in **T4**—that at the start of the cosmogony the Stoic god is present somehow in water? Difficulties arise here when we notice that some sources report that the Stoic god is identical with fire; and that the Stoics standardly hold that elemental water is both constituted through the presence of divine fire within it, as a sustaining cause, and can also undergo change (like alteration into a body with different qualities) only through the activity of divine fire. Given these views, the presence of the Stoic god as a "seminal" force in water would seem to entail that his *fire* is present in this water after all and, therefore, that the fire of the conflagration did not completely die out and some of persisted beyond the conflagration.[16] This difficulty has led some scholars to suppose that in Zeno's theory of cosmogony the transformation of the fire of the conflagration into air and water is only *partial* and that some of it persists throughout the cosmogony.[17]

Against this supposition, two important facts should be borne in mind. First, we ought not to construe the identity between the Stoic god and fire reported by some sources in a literal sense.[18] Although the Stoic god may use fire to bring about certain effects on some bodies, he is strictly speaking one of the absolutely basic principles of physical reality—"god" (*theos*) and "matter" (*hulê*)—present in any body other than the two

principles themselves, including the four elements (and, in particular, fire).[19] Thus, the Stoic god and the matter through which he acts are present in fire as much as they are present in water, air, or earth. And it follows from this that the Stoic god is non-identical to, and more basic than, any of the four elements.[20] Therefore, the thesis in **T4** that god is present in cosmogonic water does not imply, from a Zenonian point of view, that *fire* is present in that water (and hence that the fire of the conflagration is only partially transformed into air and water). It is a mistake to assume that the former implies the latter.

Second, Zeno's thesis that the Stoic god is present in cosmogonic water as the *seminal principle* of the cosmos is also consistent with the idea that no fire is present at the start of the cosmogony. As a matter of fact, fire is neither identical to, nor a necessary vehicle of, the seminal principle of the cosmos. In Stoic biology and cosmology, (1) a being's seminal principle and the seed from which that being develops are distinct from each other in the sense that the seminal principle can exist without the seed, and therefore (2) although the fire of the conflagration is the *seed* of the cosmos (*sperma tou kosmou*), the seminal principle of the cosmos does not necessarily need any fire to exist at the start of the cosmogony.[21]

We may however ask *why* Zeno holds that the fire of the conflagration is totally extinguished before the start of the cosmogony. From a philosophical perspective, this view is perplexing. Surely, a more economical hypothesis would be that the fire of the conflagration is not completely abated, but that one part of it is saved from extinction and remains alive throughout the end of the conflagration and the start of the cosmogony. So why does Zeno accept the counterintuitive position that no fire persists? The answer is that he embraced two very simple, though contestable, intuitions about the nature of fire. One is that any quantity of fire burns until
p. 303 its fuel is exhausted (as opposed to dying out before its fuel is exhausted); the other is that fire cannot endure
↳ without fuel. Clearly, the conjunction of these two claims entails that the fire of the conflagration will exhaust all the fuel available in the cosmos and die out immediately afterward; but if so, then to exist in the next cosmos, fire must be generated again out of prior substances.

The chief evidence for the first of Zeno's suppositions is a passage, not included in the *SVF*, from the third century CE Platonist Alexander Lycopolis.[22] The passage discusses an argument by Zeno to prove that "the whole will undergo a conflagration."

> **T5** For it has been rightly argued against the argument of Zeno that "the whole will undergo a conflagration" saying [that if] "everything which burns, having something to burn, will burn it completely; and the sun is fire, will it not burn what it has?" and from which he inferred, as he thought, that the whole will undergo a conflagration.[23]
>
> (Alexander Lycopolis, *Tractatus de placitis Manichaeorum* 19, 2–12)

Note the assertion "everything which burns, having something to burn, will burn it completely." This rules out both that (i) a mass of fire *F* will be extinguished before it exhausts the available fuel, *and* that (ii) the fuel available to *F* will never be exhausted. The further inference that the fire of the conflagration will be completely extinguished, implicit in **T5**, is further supported by the second claim behind Zeno's position, also very well attested in the sources for the Stoics in general, that no fire can persist without fuel.[24] Thus, the conjunction of these two claims—that any fire exhausts its fuel and that no fire can persist without fuel—entails that the fire of the conflagration will totally abate and, hence, that there is no fire in existence at the start of the cosmogony.

In opposition to his predecessor Zeno, Cleanthes maintained that some of the fire of the conflagration is not extinguished but persists throughout the cosmogony. This opposition has been particularly stressed by Hahm.[25] To conclude this section, I examine one aspect of Cleanthes's critique: his assertion against Zeno that (ii) is possible (and indeed actually happens). For Cleanthes, before the fire of the conflagration exhausts its fuel, the cosmogonic process that began while the fire of the conflagration was still burning replenishes the cosmos with new fuel. This enables a small portion of fire to persist throughout the cosmogony and indeed throughout the life of the new cosmos until the next conflagration.

The main evidence for Cleanthes's cosmogony is a passage from Stobaeus (immediately after **T3**).

> **T6** Cleanthes, on the other hand, speaks somehow in the following way: once the whole has burnt up, first its centre collapses and, next, the parts contiguous to the centre are completely quenched. And once the whole has been dampened, the last portion of fire, given the resistance of the centre to it, moves away in the opposite direction. And then he says that, when it moves upwards, it grows in size and begins the ordering of the cosmos.
>
> (Stobaeus, *Anthologium* 153, 7–13 [*SVF* 1.497])

p. 304 Given the obscurity of the text, a full reconstruction of Cleanthes's cosmogony is not possible. But leaving details aside, this much is relatively clear: at some point in the cosmogony the center of the cosmos, occupied by newly generated earth and water, offers resistance to a mass of fire that remains from the conflagration, called "the last [portion] of fire" (*to eschaton tou puros*). Given the resistance it encounters at the centre of the cosmos, this fire travels upward and away from the center to form the heavens, the upper, peripheral layer of fire that defines the third region of the Stoic cosmos. At this point, nourished by newly created fuel, it begins the ordering of the whole cosmos. This would be the last stage in the early cosmogony as conceived by Cleanthes. It would mark the beginning of later stages in which complex homogeneous bodies and heterogenous bodies are generated (stages [b] and [c] referred to at the beginning of this section).

However incomplete and speculative this reconstruction may be, it captures the way in which many modern interpreters understand the passage, and it shows that Cleanthes's deviation from Zeno is indeed significant.[26] In particular, Cleanthes does not accept the Zenonian view that the fire of the conflagration completely dies out before the start of the cosmogony; on the contrary, the fire of the conflagration is never totally extinguished, but some of it subsists *throughout* the cosmogony. In fact there is a material continuity between the fire of the conflagration, "the last [portion] of fire" in the early cosmogony and the celestial fire present in the ordered cosmos. From a Cleanthean perspective, these characterizations in fact describe a single mass of fire that changes in size and function throughout the phases of the cosmogony: at the conflagration, this mass reaches its maximal size and performs a consumptive function; once it has consumed the whole cosmos, it dwindles and begins a restorative and renewing function; subsequently, it reaches the edge of the cosmos and grows again to constitute the celestial fire whose function is to sustain the cosmos as a whole. Thus, contrary to what Zeno contends in **T5**, Cleanthes maintains that the fuel available for the fire of the conflagration is somehow never exhausted and that, in consequence, this fire burns eternally in some form.[27]

3. Chrysippus and the Stoic Conflagration

Chrysippus also made significant contributions to Stoic cosmology. There is evidence, for example, that he developed further Cleanthes's idea that the fire of the conflagration does not die out completely and that there is therefore a material continuity between the conflagration and the cosmogony.[28] But according to recent scholars—notably Jaap Mansfeld and Anthony Long—Chrysippus's principal contribution is a conception of the conflagration as positive phenomenon. In particular, Mansfeld has argued that the conflagration is a state superior even to the present cosmos and that, given its superiority, the Stoic god prefers the conflagration to
p. 305 the fully articulated cosmos.[29] In this ↳ last section, I argue that, though there is good evidence that for Chrysippus the conflagration is indeed a positive phenomenon, this evidence is insufficient for concluding, as does Mansfeld, that he regards the conflagration as superior to the cosmos in its fully generated form.

One central piece of evidence for the positive status of the conflagration according to Chrysippus is a passage from Plutarch that contains an argument by Chrysippus against the destructibility of the cosmos. In this argument, when the conflagration takes place the "cosmos should not be said to die."

> **T7** In the first book of *On Providence* he says that Zeus goes on growing until all things have been consumed in his growth, for, since death is separation of soul from body and the soul of the cosmos is not separated but goes on growing continually until it has completely absorbed its matter, the cosmos should not be said to die.[30]
>
> (Plutarch, *SR* 1052C [*SVF* 2.604, LS 46E])

Here one assumption—implicit in the idea that the cosmos has soul and body—is that the cosmos is an animal.[31] From there the argument proceeds as follows: (1) for any animal, death is the separation of its soul from its body, and (2) at the conflagration, the soul of the cosmos absorbs, or consumes, its own body or matter (*hulê*), but (3) the consumption or absorption of something *A* by something *B*, and the separation of *B* from *A* are two different processes. Therefore, at the conflagration the cosmos does not die.[32] Notably, Chrysippus here avoids the negative term "destruction" (*phthora*) in characterizing the conflagration and, in general, there is little evidence that the Stoics who accepted the conflagration identified it as form of destruction.[33] According to **T7** neither should we use "death," with the negative connotations that this term may carry, to describe the conflagration.

Mansfeld further notes Chrysippus's description of the fire of the conflagration as a light or a "flash" (*augê*) as opposed to a "flame" (*phlox*). According to Philo: "[at the conflagration, the cosmos] must change into either flame or a flash, into flame as Cleanthes thought, or into a flash as Chrysippus thought."[34] The nature of Chrysippus's flash—and in particular the difference between this flash and Cleanthes's flame—is not obvious; but at any rate, the term carries a specifically positive connotation.[35]

Now, according to Mansfeld, the fact that Chrysippus here describes the conflagration in positive terms implies that it is better than the fully ordered cosmos: "From such statements by, and testimonies concerning, Chrysippus, it follows beyond doubt that in his view the state of affairs during the total conflagration is far superior to that of the familiar, ordered universe."[36] It is however, I suggest, difficult to specify grounds, acceptable to the Stoics themselves, that could explain why the conflagration is "far superior" to the ordered cosmos.

One hypothesis, handled by Mansfeld with some reservation, is that the conflagration is better than the developed cosmos because the former periodically eliminates all evil, and so has a purging, beneficial effect.[37] The fully generated cosmos, in all its complexity, includes genuine evils that are removed when it changes
p. 306 completely into fire. ↳ On this hypothesis, the conflagration is superior to the ordered cosmos for two reasons that are connected but that deserve separate consideration: (a) since the conflagration does not include evils but the ordered cosmos does, the conflagration is for that reason superior to the ordered cosmos; further (b) the conflagration periodically purges the cosmos from evil, and so is better than the ordered cosmos precisely because it has this purging effect (even though the purification itself is never *permanent* since, after each restoration, the cosmos gradually evolves and generates the same evils that existed in it before the conflagration).

Evidence relevant to (a) is found in Plutarch's discussion of evil in *Comm. not.,* in which Plutarch's Academic spokesman Diadumenus argues that no good can exist without some evil. In the course of the argument, Diadumenus claims that the Stoic position on this question is the opposite, given their conception of the conflagration as a state where something good exists without any evil. The relevant passage is this.

> **T8** Whenever they [sc. the Stoics] conflagrate the cosmos, no evil whatever remains, and the whole is then prudent and wise. Hence, prudence exists, though no evil does, and it is not required that evil obtains for prudence to be present.[38]
>
> (Plutarch, *De Comm. Not.* 1067A [*SVF* 2.606, LS 46N])

On the assumption that it reliably reports a Chrysippean view, T8 does support the claim that there is no evil present in the conflagration. Taken on its own, however, it does not support the further claim that the conflagration is for that reason *better* than the ordered cosmos. Both the developed cosmos and the conflagration are equally examples of divine reason, and so of virtue in operation; in other words, the only thing that counts as "good" for the Stoics (virtue) is instantiated in both the conflagration and the ordered cosmos. It just so happens that the way this good is implemented in the ordered cosmos necessarily involves the presence of evil as well.[39]

What, then, of (b)—the idea that the conflagration is superior to the developed cosmos because it is a "purification" of the latter? Here there are two significant texts to consider. One is a passage from Hippolytus.

> **T9** And they [sc. the Stoics] say that the soul is immortal but that it is a body and that it came into existence from the cooling of the surrounding air. This is also why it is named "soul." They even acknowledge that, since souls are limited in number, a transmigration occurs, and admit that there will be conflagration and a purification of this cosmos; according to some, of the whole of it, and according to others, of a part of it. As a matter of fact, they say that it is partially purified and, roughly speaking, they call "purification" the destruction [of the cosmos] and the generation of another [cosmos] from it.
>
> (Hippolytus, *Ref*. 1.21.3–4 [*SVF* 2.807 and 598])

As is rightly noted by Mansfeld himself, this passage does not convey genuinely Stoic ideas. First, the Stoics did
p. 307 not embrace the theory of transmigration, to which ↳ Hippolytus refers here.[40] Second, there is no evidence that any Stoic ever accepted the theory of partial conflagration mentioned here.[41] This account may derive from Heraclitus who, according to a certain interpretation of his cosmology, did believe in partial conflagration.[42] Given its syncretic cast, the passage as a whole is not sufficient for inferring that the Stoics themselves regarded the conflagration as a purification. The other text is a passage from Clement.

> **T10** or he too [sc. Heraclitus], having learned from the philosophy the barbarians, knew of the purification by fire of those who live viciously, which the Stoics later called "conflagration" and believe, in accordance with him, that even the peculiarly qualified will resurrect so treating of the resurrection.
>
> (Clement, *Strom*. 5.1.9.4 [> *SVF* 2.630])

This reveals that the conception of the conflagration as a purification in Clement is bound up in Christian thought with the idea that the recurrence of the same individuals from one cosmos to the other is a form of resurrection (*anastasis*). So **T10** suggests that the attribution to the Stoics (in both **T10** and **T9**) of the idea that the purpose of the conflagration is to purge the cosmos from evil periodically is part of an *interpretatio christiana* of Stoicism, seeking to present the theory of conflagration as an "adumbration of the true Christian doctrine."[43] Thus neither **T9** nor **T10**—and the same goes for **T8**—warrant the conclusion that Chrysippus (or any other Stoic) believed that the conflagration is to be construed as a "purification" of the cosmos and so better than the cosmos.

There is a second, distinct reason for taking the conflagration to be better than the ordered cosmos that should also be set aside: namely, that the cosmos is teleologically subordinated to the conflagration. The basic proposal here is that the cosmos serves the overall function of being fuel for the fire of the conflagration.[44] And so, since any end is more valuable than the means used to achieve it, the conflagration has more value than the cosmos.

This proposal, however, is quite speculative; and even if it were accepted, it would leave unresolved important questions about the goodness of the cosmic order. If the cosmos were just a means of supplying the conditions for the conflagration, it would be hard to understand why the present cosmos is as complex as it actually is and

not, for example, something much simpler (e.g., a single homogeneous mass of air or water). Why moreover does the cosmos involve not just composite substances, but such a large *variety* of these? The same line of thought applies to the *beauty* of the cosmos. Clearly, the hypothesis that the conflagration is better than the ordered cosmos because the ordered cosmos exists only to supply the conditions for the conflagration does not fit well with the current complexity and beauty of the cosmos.[45]

In sum, the notion that Chrysippus's theory of the conflagration is motivated by a commitment to the superiority of the conflagration to the cosmos is problematical. The question whether the Chrysippean god causes the conflagration because he regards it as superior to the cosmos—and the broader question of what
p. 308 exactly is Chrysippus's ↳ distinctive contribution to Stoic conflagration theory—is far from settled and requires further exploration.

3. Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that many of the ideas present in Stoic cosmology have significant precedents in earlier thinkers, but that their combination into a single theory is unique to the Stoics. In particular, the Stoic cosmos is structurally similar to other geocentric systems in antiquity but also sharply different given that its cosmic order is periodically interrupted and completely restored. This is perhaps the single most important contribution of Stoicism to ancient cosmology. As we noticed, the Stoic theory of conflagration and cosmogony relies very much on ideas inherited by the Stoics from earlier philosophers working in the field of physics and meteorology, especially Anaximander and Heraclitus; but the theory itself does not have a clear antecedent in earlier thinkers.

I have offered an account of the mechanism that leads to conflagration, of the cosmogony by which the cosmos is restored, and of the contribution of Chrysippus to Stoic conflagration theory. In general outline, we have a good grasp of these issues. But I have stressed that in many cases there is no unanimity among the Stoics and, in fact, that very often the state of the evidence does not enable us to ascertain with exactitude what the Stoic position is. Likewise, the present chapter is far from fully comprehensive. An important element of Stoic cosmology that I had to bypass is everlasting recurrence.[46] One of the chief philosophical problems concerning everlasting recurrence is the following: supposing that the cosmos C^* restored after the conflagration is strictly identical to the present one C—as some Stoics believed—in what sense is C earlier than C^*? In more general terms, how can the time occupied by the present cosmos be different from that occupied by C^* (how can the former be "earlier" than the latter) if C and C^* are indeed identical? These are questions that would need to be addressed in a full philosophical assessment of Stoic cosmology.[47]

Further Reading

Comprehensive treatments of Stoic cosmology are provided in: Hahm 1977, Sedley 2007: 205–38, Furley 1999, LS 1.274–312 and 2.271–309, Boeri and Salles 2014: 253–475, and Wynne 2019 (a study of Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*).

The Stoic theory of conflagration is studied in Mansfeld 1979 and 1981, Long 2006, Cooper 2009, and Salles 2005, 2009, 2015b, and 2016.

Detailed treatments of the Stoic theory of elements are given in Diels 1899: 69–88 and 447–72, Lapidge 1973, Frede 2005, Cooper 2009, and Salles 2015b and 2015c. The latest detailed discussion of the Stoic theory of elements is Hensley 2017.

For a close analysis of the evidence on exhalations and the generation of soul, see Gourinat 2005: 562–6.

p. 309 ↳ For the Stoic proofs of the intelligence of the cosmos, see Sedley 2007: 210–30, Salles 2018a, and Powers, this volume.

For the doctrine of everlasting recurrence and the dispute over the thesis of transcyclical identity, see Barnes 1978, Sorabji 1983: 182–90, Long 2006, Gourinat 2002, and Salles 2003 and 2018b.

Notes

1. For the structure of the Stoic cosmos, see Jones 2003 and more recently Hensley 2019: 3–9.

2. See the evidence collected under LS 46D–O. A small number of relatively minor Stoics denied the conflagration (Boethus of Sidon and Panaetius *ap*. Philo in LS 46P) whereas others, also a minority, suspended judgment (Zeno of Tarsus *ap*. Eusebius in *SVF* 3 Zeno Tarsensis 5, Diogenes of Babylon *ap*. Philo in *SVF* 3 Diogenes Babylonius 27 and Panaetius *ap*. Cicero in *De Natura Deorum* [ND] 2.118 quoted as **T2**).

3. For the heaviness of water opposed to the lightness of air, see notably LS 49J, discussed in Mouraviev 2005: 233–44.

4. See DL 7.152 (*SVF* 2.698): "The cause of their production [sc. of winds] is the sun when clouds evaporate (*exatmizonta*)." Note that this evaporation is not a transformation of water into air—since clouds are already made of air (as is implied by the fact reported in DL 7.153 [*SVF* 2.702] that rain is a transformation of a cloud into *water*)—but a thinning of the very air that constitutes the clouds. For a different account of winds, see *SVF* 2.699.

5. For the evidence from the theory of the generation of soul, see *SVF* 1.141, 2.778, 2.781–3.847, 886, 911 and Marcus Aurelius 5.33. For the evidence from the theory of cosmogony, see *SVF* 1.102, 1.535, and 2.579.

6. The translations in this chapter are either my own or adapted from LS.

7. For additional meteorological evidence, see the argument developed *ND* 2.26–7 to prove that atmospheric air contains fire ("in fact, air itself, though by nature the coldest of the elements, is the least devoid of heat": *ipse vero aer, qui natura est maxime frigidus, minime est expers caloris*). In other words, air is generated from water "by exhalation" (*ex respiratione*) but exhalation requires heat, which remains in the air at least for some time. This implies that the exhalations from water are made of air, not of water. I return to this issue in §2.

8. In his commentary *ad loc*. (1968: 845) Pease suggests that "*maris, aquarum* represent the salt and fresh waters, respectively," I am grateful to the editors for this reference.

9. As the editors have pointed out to me, **T2** presents *two* different views. One is the view which I described previously in this chapter. The other, merely hinted, is that celestial fire releases back—in some unspecified form—the exhalations they have consumed with absolutely no loss of matter (*nihil*). These two alternatives also seem to show up in Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 10.7.2.

10. For (c), see the important Galen passage in LS 55F (preserved only in Arabic and in a Renaissance Latin translation on which Long and Sedley's translation is based). A central component of (c) is the anthropogony, for which see Sedley 2007: 210–25, and Salles 2018a and 2020.

11. Accepting Wachsmuth's emendation *leptunomenou* for the mss *ek tinos*.

12. See Hahm 1977: 60–2, 75–6, and more recently Long 2010 (cited further in this chapter), Hensley 2019: 15–19 and Salles 2020.

13. Because they encode and determine the development of an organism in this way, some scholars have compared Stoic seminal principles to DNA. See Long 2010: 49, "In a quite ↳ literal sense, this divinity, to whom the Stoics gave the exalted name Zeus, fathers the world by endowing matter (allegorically construed as the female goddess Hera) with a kind of cosmic DNA or genetic program … Having seeded the world, as it were, the Stoic divinity causes the world to evolve according to his predetermined formulae (*spermatikoi logoi*)." See also Cooper 2009: 101, note 19.
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14. For discussion, see Hahm 1977: 57–90, Furley 1999: 434–41, Gourinat 2009: 59–62, Cooper 2009: 111–15, Salles 2015a: 18 and 18, note 10 and Hensley 2019: 15–19.

15. For other recent proposals, see Salles 2015a: 18 and 18, note 10, Hensley 2017: 379–83, and Hensley 2019: 9.

16. I use masculine pronouns to refer to the Stoic god since our sources often identity the Stoic god with Zeus. But the Stoic god as first principle (*archê*) is something more basic than a person and, in fact, something that is not anthropomorphic at all. Thus in certain contexts the neuter pronoun "it" would be much more appropriate to refer to him. I am thankful to Vanessa de Harven for a discussion of this and other issues relevant to this chapter.

17. The latest defense of this line of interpretation is Hensley (2019). But the view that in Zeno's theory the transformation of the fire of the conflagration is complete also has some advocates; see Gould 1970: 121 and 121, note 1, and Hahm 1977: 57–60 (including note 2) and 80, note 64. A recent defense of the Gould-Hahm interpretation is Salles 2015a.

18. See notably the Aetius passage cited in *SVF* 2.1027 (LS 46A).

19. On the Stoic principles, see Ierodiakonou, this volume.

20. As Anthony Long points out, "[The Stoics regularly speak] as if their god were straightforwardly identical with fire. This is an over-simple statement of their position … From a metaphysical viewpoint, god as the active principle is prior to fire" (Long 1985: 267–8).

21. For passages that imply that the seminal principle determines the development of the seed, of the embryo and of the living thing—and therefore that none of them is the necessary vehicle of the seminal principle—see notably Simplicius, *in Cat*. 306, 18–31 (> *SVF* 2.499), Origen, *in evang. Ionn*. 20.5.35–7 (*SVF* 2.747), Origen, *in evang. Ionn*. 20.2.3 (*SVF* 2.746), and Plutarch, *De Comm. Not*. 1077B–C (< *SVF* 2.744, 2.618a). I deal with this question in Salles 2020. On the cosmic seed, see notably the reports of Eusebius, Dio Chrysostom, Plutarch, and Philo in *SVF* 1.98, 2.569, 618, and 619 respectively. For discussion, see Hahm 1977: 60–1 and Salles 2020.

22. An account of the place of this passage in Alexander's treatise is provided in Mansfeld-Horst 1974: 74, note 293 to note 296, and Mansfeld 1979: 147–55.

23. Reading <ὅτι> καύσῃ with Mansfeld-Horst against the mss and Brinkmann.

24. See, for instance, Cleanthes *ap*. Cicero, *ND* 2.40: "no fire can persist without nutriment of some sort" (*nullus ignis sine pastu aliquo possit permanere*) referring specifically to celestial fire and the speech by Cotta—the Epicuran spokesman in Book 3 of Cicero's *ND*—at *ND* 3.37 (< *SVF* 2.421): "do you not also hold that all fire requires fuel and cannot possibly endure unless it is fed and that the sun, moon and other heavenly bodies draw sustenance in some cases from bodies of fresh water and in other cases from sea? This is the reason given by Cleanthes to explain why the sun turns back and does proceed farther that the tropic of Cancer." See also the discussion by Philo of the dispute between Cleanthes and Chrysippus regarding the nature of the fire of the conflagration (*De Aeternitati Mundi* 85–93): the fire of the conflagration—whether it is flame (*phlox*) as Cleanthes holds or light (*augê*) as Chrysippus thinks (cited in §3)—must perish once it has consumed all combustible substance because "flame perishes with its feeder" and "light perishes with the flame" (92).
p. 311 ↳ See also 85: "For if the substance is consumed by fire, the fire too must be extinguished having nothing any longer to feed it."

25. See Hahm 1977: 79–81, 240–7.

26. See Hahm 1977: 79–81 and 240–7 followed by Salles 2015a: 22–6. Detailed reconstructions of Cleanthes's cosmogonic theory are also offered in Meerwaldt 1951: 44–53 and Hensley 2019: 19–26.

27. The arguments supplied in Hensley 2019 for holding that in Zeno's cosmology (as reported in **T4** and **T5**) "some fire persists throughout the conflagration" and "some water must be present in cosmogonic water" (2019: 10) are summarized on p. 15 as follows (the numbering is mine): "[1] Philo … denies that all of the conflagration's fire dies, [2] Chrysippus states that an object that is made of fire and air is present in the water [when fire changes into water in the early cosmogony], and, [3] according to basic Stoic physics, fire and air must be present in the cosmogonic water to cause the remaining changes and to sustain the water long enough for these changes to take place. On the other hand, we have Seneca [*Naturales Quaestiones* 3.13.1–2]. And, while being a *bona fide* Stoic, [4] it is unclear whether he is reporting orthodox early Stoic doctrine here, a later Stoic's views, or his own view. Thus, on balance, it seems that the evidence supports the interpretation according to which the initial two cosmogonic changes are partial, and some of the conflagration's fire persists throughout the cosmogony." Against [1] it is worth noticing that the Philo passage cited by Hensley (*De Aeternitate Mundi,* 89) actually says that *some*, not all, Stoics (*tines tōn apo tês stoas*) deny that all of the conflagration's fire dies; Philo also implies that these deviant Stoics made this claim against another, earlier group of Stoics. Indeed the Philo passage fits well with the thesis of Gould and Hahm that Zeno proposed a cosmogony in which all of the fire of the conflagration is extinguished and that Cleanthes reacted against this theory by holding that some of it persists. As to point [4], the Seneca passage is strong evidence that some Stoics—whether Zeno or others—did argue that all the fire of the conflagration is extinguished. So it seems the view that some of it persists cannot be ascribed to the Stoics *en bloc*.

28. See notably Plutarch, *SR* 1052F–1053B (*SVF* 2.579, *BS* 15.8) and 1053B (*SVF* 2.605, LS 46F). Chrysippus's cosmogony is studied in Gould 1970: 119–21 and Cooper 2009: 111–14.

29. Mansfeld 1979: 174–83, 1981: 304–9, and 1999: 468. Long accepts Mansfeld's view that that the conflagration for Chrysippus is positive, but not his thesis that it is better than the cosmos. See Long 1985: 266–74.

30. Reading *eis hautên exanalôsêi* with Cherniss and most mss as printed earlier in this chapter.

31. For discussion of this view, see Powers, this volume.

32. The soundness of the argument requires a proof of (3): the processes of separation and consumption envisaged here need to be sufficiently different from one another to guarantee that the latter, in contrast with the former, is compatible with the persistence of the animal as a whole. I discuss this issue in Salles 2009.

33. See Nemesius of Emesa, *De natura Hominis* 111.14–112.3 Morani (LS 52C) and also Alexander of Aphodisias, *in Ar. meteor*. 61, 34–65, 7 Hayduck (*SVF* 2.594). However, the thesis that the cosmos is destructible in Diogenes Laertius, 7.141 (*SVF* 2.589, LS 46J) is not clearly Stoic. See also the view reported by Eusebius in connection with the Stoics in general, according to which those who believe in the "dissolution into fire of all things" used the term "destruction" in a qualified sense to mean a type of "natural change" (*SVF* 2.596, LS 46K).

34. Philo, *De Aeternitati Mundi* 90 (> *SVF* 611).

p. 312 35. As Mansfeld remarks (1979: 177), "[W]hatever vestiges of grimness total conflagration might still have possessed in the theories of Zeno (who has all things return to 'fire,' though, of course, this notion carries, as we have seen, important qualifications) and Cleanthes (who has all things return to 'flame,' undoubtedly qualified in a similar way), is abolished when this event is spoken of in terms of 'brightness' [*augê* in the Philo passage earlier in this chapter]: the absorption of all things into light is hardly to be regarded as something even imaginatively to be feared." On the contrast between "flame" and "flash," see the important discussion in Cooper 2009 (especially pp. 103–5).

36. Mansfeld 1979: 177.

37. See Mansfeld 1983: 220. However, this reservation is more nuanced in Mansfeld 1981: 306 where a parallel between the Stoics and the Gnostics is drawn and the imperfection of the Stoics cosmos is presented as a reason in itself for the positiveness of its destruction: "Like the Gnostics, the Stoics believed that our world, as compared to a better condition of things, is not perfect; like them, they saw its destruction as a positive event."

38. Cited by Mansfeld 1983: 220; critically discussed in Long 1985: 272.

39. Cf. Long 1985, 272–3.

40. One exception is Seneca. But Seneca himself acknowledges that he owes this belief to a Pythagorean influence. See *Ep*. 75, 20; 76, 10–11; 78, 34; and 108, 17–22 cited in Mansfeld 1983: 218.

41. See the evidence analyzed in Mansfeld 1983: 219–20 ("the idea—in a Stoic context—that cosmic catastrophes are only partial cannot be paralleled before the first cent. CE: Dion Chrysost., *Or*. 36, 47–9. This may represent a conflation of Stoic ideas with notions derived from Plato and Aristotle [Mansfeld cites *Tim*. 22C and Aristotle, *Meteor*. 1.14]; possibly, also an *interpretatio stoica* of Heraclitus' theory of the Great Year").

42. As Mansfeld acknowledges (1983: 210–20). For a partial conflagration in Heraclitus, see, e.g., Kirk 1954: 311 and 314.

43. Mansfeld 1983: 225–6.

44. As Mansfeld 1979: 161–2 remarks, "[W]hen all the fuel has been consumed, i.e. turned into fire (as it must be since substance is not quantitatively infinite), a gradual quenching of the fire sets in and spreads until … only a 'liquid mass' is left … I suppose that this watery state of the totality of substance is where the cosmic cycle is, so to speak, at its lowest ebb, and that the creation-in-phases of the ordered universe out of this humid 'seed,' slowly reverting to or developing into other elementary states is 'good' … precisely because it also is the first important step towards the next [conflagration]."

45. Moreover our evidence suggests that for the Stoics the complex beauty of the cosmos, so far from being accidental with regard to its purpose, are actually the locus of its value; see Powers, this volume.

46. For discussion of this theory, see Barnes 1978, Long 1985, Gourinat 2002, Salles 2003 and 2018b.

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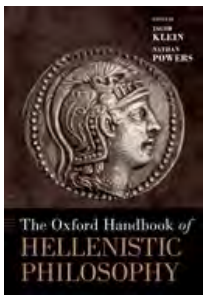
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CHAPTER

14 The Stoics on Language

Luca Castagnoli Author Notes

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Abstract

This chapter surveys Stoic views of language, which the Stoics discussed under the general heading of logic (*logikê*). As far as we can judge from our scant evidence, the breadth of the Stoics' interest in language was unsurpassed in antiquity, and intersected with several other areas of their philosophy, including ontology, logic, and philosophy of mind. After providing a brief overview of the Stoics' theory of the origin of language and their associated practice of etymology, this chapter considers Stoic semantics and the Stoic classification of sayables (*lekta*), including the truth-evaluable statables (*axiômata*) that figure in Stoic logic. It turns next to Stoic views of argument, ambiguity, and grammar, and to the significance of these topics for Stoic philosophy as a whole.

Keywords: Stoics, language, sayables, statables, assertibles, logic, argument, ambiguity, grammar

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Ancient philosophers did not introduce a discipline called "philosophy of language." Nonetheless, they reflected extensively upon the origins, nature and limits of language, and upon the relation between words, thoughts, and reality. Although pre-Platonic thinkers began such reflections early on, it was with Plato and Aristotle that central questions in philosophy of language were first explored in a sustained, albeit not systematic, way.[1] As far as we can judge from our regrettably scant evidence, however, the breadth of the Stoics' interest in language was unsurpassed in antiquity; our sources provide tantalizing glimpses of the depth and originality of the Stoic contribution in this area.

This chapter will offer an overview of this contribution.[2] Because the nature of our evidence—typically late, second-hand, and fragmentary—makes it often impossible to identify the specific contributions of individual Stoics, many doctrines and arguments will be attributed, generically, to "the Stoics." It is important to

recognize, however, that these doctrines and arguments span several centuries, from Zeno of Citium, the founder of the school in Athens in the late fourth century BCE, to Roman Stoics such as Seneca and Epictetus in the first and second centuries CE.[3]

1. The Place of Philosophy of Language within the Stoic System

The Stoics called "logic" (*logikê*) one of the three main parts of philosophy or philosophical "discourse," alongside physics and ethics (e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.39 = LS 26B).[4] Stoic logic dealt with everything that has to do with *logos* understood not only as "argument" or "reasoning" but encompassing, more broadly, "language," "speech," and "rational discourse." The Stoic views on language therefore belong to the "logical" part of philosophy.

p. 316 The Stoics stressed the interconnection of all parts of their philosophical system and of all their doctrines (e.g., Cicero *Fin.* 3.74), and Stoic reflections on language are an excellent illustration of this systematicity: they intertwine with central notions and doctrines in Stoic ontology, physics, theology, psychology, and epistemology—besides, of course, logic narrowly understood.

This is illustrated by two further uses of the term "*logos*" besides those previously listed. The Stoics also used "*logos*" as the name of the immanent divine and rational principle that organizes and structures the whole of reality (Diogenes Laertius 7.134 = LS 44B). Human beings differ from other animals exactly in that divine providence endowed them with *logos*, "reason," by which they are able to investigate and grasp the rational structure of the cosmos. In particular, their "impressions" (*phantasiai*)—namely their conscious thoughts or mental states, including perceptual ones—are "rational" (*logikai*); i.e., they have a propositional content that can be shown forth through speech (*logos*).[5] Whereas some animals, such as parrots, can utter articulate sounds (*prophorikos logos*), only mature human beings have "inner speech" (*endiathetos logos*).[6] The latter requires the ability to combine impressions and a conception of the relation of "following" (*akolouthia*) (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.275–6 = LS 53T), on which the capacity for inference depends.[7]

2. The Stoics on the Origin of Language and Etymologies

Ancient thinkers from at least the time of the Sophists onwards debated whether the origin and development of language occurred somehow "by nature" or as the result of some "conventional" act of imposition of words. This question often intersected with the question whether the "correct use of words" is fixed by convention or rather answers to objective natural criteria. Plato's *Cratylus* crystallized this nature-versus-convention debate, which remained at the center of later discussions of the origins and correctness of language.

According to Origen (*C. Cels.* 1.24) the Stoics thought that the first human vocalizations imitated the things which they name; in the nature-versus-convention debate, then, he saw the Stoics taking the side of nature, presumably because a name that resembles the thing it names is naturally fit to signify it. Augustine's late report (*De Dial.* 6) suggests that the Stoics believed that a small pool of first words—the "cradle," "root," or "seed" of a language (10.9–11; 11.13–14)—originated either with onomatopoeic imitation (e.g., the Latin "*tinnitus*" imitates the sound of struck bronze) or via a less direct mechanism, by which the way in which the sound of a certain word affects our hearing resembles a certain quality or object (10.3–9). For example, "*mel*" ("honey") affects hearing "sweetly," thus imitating the most distinctive characteristic of honey.[8]

p. 317 Different principles, especially analogical ones, subsequently intervened in the formation of other words. For the Stoics, only the first words were mimetic, and they were so onomatopoeically (or quasi-onomatopoeically) because of the communicative effectiveness of onomatopoeia: that form of natural imitation was the best way to fulfill the teleological function of language, making communication easier.[9] By contrast with the linguistic

naturalism presented in Plato's *Cratylus*, the first words did not attempt to imitate the *essences* of their *nominata*.

Even so, words and their etymologies were considered worth studying as ways to gain information about our ancestors' uncorrupted understanding of reality. The Stoics adopted some etymologies presented in the *Cratylus*, for example for the oblique forms of "Zeus": *Dia* and *Zêna*. They explained these forms by claiming that Zeus, whom they identified with their divine principle, is ultimately responsible for "living" (*zên*), and that it is "through" or "because of" (*dia*) him that everything comes about (Diogenes Laertius 7.147 = LS 54A; cf. Plato, *Cra*. 396a). Another example of the use of etymology to support philosophical theory comes from Chrysippus's explanation of the origin of the first person singular pronoun *egô* ("I"): in uttering it, first the lower lip and then the chin point down deictically toward the chest, which according to Chrysippus was the seat of consciousness, and thereby what we would call "the self" (Galen *On Hippocrates' and Plato's Doctrines* 2.2.9–11 = LS 34J).

3. Stoic Semantics: Signifiers and Things Signified

Chrysippus (280–207 BCE) was the most original, prolific, and influential Stoic philosopher; he wrote at least 130 works on a variety of "logical" subjects, including many which we would catalog under the heading "philosophy of language." Regrettably, virtually all these works have been lost; even if we count only those works whose titles are relevant to the subjects outlined in the rest of the chapter (thus excluding the whole syllogistic theory and the study of logical paradoxes), Chrysippus's output was about eight times the length of Aristotle's *Organon* as currently constituted.[10]

Philosophy of language was studied by the Stoics mainly under the heading of "dialectic" (*dialektikê*), which was defined as "the science of how to discuss (*dialegesthai*) correctly in question-and-answer discourses."[11] Dialectic was one of the two main branches of logic, together with "rhetoric," the "science of speaking well in continuous discourses" (Diogenes Laertius 7.42 = LS 31A).[12]

According to Chrysippus, the subject-matter of dialectic was in turn twofold: "signifiers" (*sêmainonta*) and "things signified" (*sêmainomena*) (Diogenes Laertius 7.62):

- the part on signifiers included the study of utterances, expressions, speech and its parts, dialects, the virtues (conciseness, purity, clarity, appropriateness, elegance) ↳ and vices (barbarism, solecism) of speech, ambiguity, euphony, poetics (literary criticism), etymology;

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- the part on things signified included incomplete and complete "sayables" (*lekta*), truth, modalities, arguments, validity and invalidity, paradoxes, and sophisms.

3.1. Signifiers

Signifiers are physical ("bodily") entities: an "utterance," or "sound" (*phônê*), is simply some portion of air that has been struck and becomes the specific object of hearing (Diogenes Laertius 7.55 = LS 33H). According to the Stoics, only "bodies" (*sômata*) can act and be acted upon, and therefore only bodies *exist*: the air which constitutes the utterance is acted upon by the speaker, and in turn acts upon the ears (and then the mind) of the listener.[13] Human beings are capable of "articulate" (*enarthros*) utterances, called "expressions" (*lexeis*); but only signifying expressions issuing from the thought of the speaker count as "speech" (*logos*). The word "*blituri*," for example, is an articulate expression, but does not signify anything, and so does not count as speech (Diogenes Laertius 7.56–7).[14] Neither do the articulate and signifying sounds emitted by a parrot, or by a hi-fi system, count as speech, since they are not manifestations of the parrot's or hi-fi's thoughts.[15]

The Stoics' interests included purely grammatical aspects of language (e.g., "dialects," defined as sets of linguistic expressions encompassing the distinctive phonetic practices of a linguistic community, and "solecism"), and Stoic theories were hugely influential in the development of Greco-Roman grammar (see §5).

Chrysippus and Diogenes of Babylon (second century BCE) classified various parts of speech:

- "proper name" (*onoma*), e.g., "Socrates";
- "appellative" (*prosêgoria*), including both nouns, e.g., "horse," and adjectives, e.g., "white";
- "verb" (*rhêma*), which includes participles, e.g., "writes" and "writing";
- "connective" (*sundesmos*), including conjunctions, e.g., "and," "or," and prepositions, e.g., "in," "to";
- "article" (*arthron*), e.g., "the."[16]

It is important to stress, however, that these parts of speech were defined on the basis of what they signified or their syntactic contribution to signification. For example, (Diogenes Laertius 7.58 = LS 33M),

- a proper name is that part of speech which signifies a corporeal "peculiar quality," e.g., "Socrates" signifies the quality of "Socratesness" or being Socrates;
- an appellative signifies a corporeal "common quality," e.g., "horse" signifies the quality of "horseness" or being a horse;

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- ↳ a verb signifies an incorporeal "predicable," e.g., "writes" signifies writing (see §3.3);
- a connector binds other parts of speech together (on the question whether connectors signify, see §3.7).[17]

3.2. Things Signified: Sayables (*lekta*)

Central to the Stoic theory of language is the concept of "sayable" (*lekton*), the most original and debated Stoic contribution to philosophy of language.[18]

According to the Stoics, "speaking" or "saying" (*legein*) is different from "uttering" or "voicing" (*propheresthai*): when we speak, we *utter* significant expressions (i.e., articulate sounds) in a certain language, but what we thereby *say* and signify are incorporeal sayables (Diogenes Laertius 7.57 = LS 33A). The term "*lekton*" is a substantivized form of the verbal adjective formed from the verb "to say" (*legein*), and Greek verbal adjectives can equally indicate a passive state ("what is said") or a passive possibility ("what *can* be said"). The sayables, which in our sources are also often referred to as *pragmata* ("things"), are thus what is meant by our words: the things that we say and that will be understood by other speakers of the language. But the sayables also include, presumably, everything that *can be said* and meant, whether they get said or not.

Since in Stoic ontology only what is corporeal exists, incorporeal sayables cannot "exist" (*einai*), but rather "subsist" (*huphistanai*), like the other incorporeals, space, void, and time (e.g., Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 10.218).[19] The non-existence of sayables should not be misinterpreted as a complete lack of reality: incorporeals, like bodies, are "something."

A key piece of evidence for trying to make sense of the theory of *lekta* is this testimony by Sextus Empiricus:

> **T1** The Stoics say that three things are linked to one another: what is signified, what signifies, and the bearer. What signifies is the utterance (*phônê*), e.g. "Dio." What is signified is the thing (*pragma*) itself which is shown by the utterance and which we grasp when it subsists upon our thought but which foreigners do not understand although they hear the utterance. The bearer (*to tugchanon*) is the

> external item, e.g. Dion himself. Of these things, two are bodies—the utterance and the bearer—and one is incorporeal—the thing signified or "sayable" (*lekton*), which is true or false.
>
> (*Math.* 8.11–12 = LS 33B)[20]

According to this report, the Stoics seem to have introduced a three-tiered account of signification, in which (1) linguistic expressions (corporeal signifiers) signify (2) incorporeal *lekta*, which are what gets said through those expressions *about* (3) objects in the world, which are the "bearers" of what is said.[21]

In the opening chapter of his *De interpretatione*, Aristotle had offered the following sketch of the ingredients of significant language:

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> **T2** Spoken sounds are tokens (*sumbola*) of affections (*pathêmata*) in the soul, and written marks tokens of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of—affections of the soul—are the same for all; and what these affections are likenesses of—things—are also the same.
>
> (1.16a1–7).[22]

According to Aristotle, our words signify, directly (spoken utterances) or indirectly (inscriptions), our "affections of the mind," namely thoughts; and our thoughts represent, in turn, the reality we think and speak of.[23] Stoic *lekta* then seem to assume, somehow, the intermediate role between language and the world that had been played by thoughts in Aristotle's account.[24] But Sextus's example in **T1** fails to clarify just what "thing" (*pragma*) is supposed to be said about Dion through our utterance. The end of the passage suggests that what is being said is either true or false. Long suggested that the thing said must be something like the meaning of the sentence "This is Dion".[25] Frede conjectured that the text could be emended so as to have "Dion is walking" as the utterance discussed (although he later discarded the conjecture).[26] Frede's conjecture would make **T1** consistent with the following testimony from Seneca:

> **T3** I see Cato walking: sense-perception has revealed this, and my mind has believed it. What I see is a body … Then I say "Cato is walking." What I now utter, he [sc. a Stoic] says, is not a body, but a certain enunciation about a body, which some call a proposition, others a thing enunciated, and others a thing said … There is a great difference between naming it [sc. a certain body] and speaking about it.
>
> (*Ep.* 117.13 = LS 33E)[27]

What is said about the corporeal Cato by the corporeal utterance (or inscription) "Cato is walking" is *that Cato is walking*; and this, unlike Cato and the utterance, is not something corporeal.

Whether or not the Stoics introduced *lekta* into their theory of signification to play the same structural role as Aristotle's "affections of the soul," *lekta* are not mental states, but public entities which secure the possibility of communication: it is the same sayable that is expressed by a certain speaker and becomes the content of a listener's thought. The Aristotelian commentators criticized the Stoics precisely for introducing what they saw as superfluous entities between thoughts and things (cf. Ammonius *Commentary on De Interpretatione* 17, 24–8); but the idea that the same *lekta* can be shared is prima facie more promising than Aristotle's suggestion that mental "affections" are somehow "the same" for all human beings, which might appear to conflate thoughts with their contents.

Although sayables are not thoughts understood as acts of thinking (which, for the Stoics, are corporeal), they are the intentional content of our thoughts or "rational impressions":

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> **T4** A sayable, they [sc. the Stoics] say, is what subsists in correspondence to a rational impression; and an impression is rational if what is presented in correspondence to it can be set out in speech (*logos*).

> (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.70 = LS 33C)[28]

As we have seen, whereas some animals can make articulate utterances, only human beings have "inner speech": their "impressions" are "rational," namely have a propositional content that can be articulated through significant speech (*logos*). Thus a strict relationship between language and thought holds in Stoicism: there is nothing we can think that cannot be said, and there is nothing sayable that we cannot, at least in principle, think.[29] And since, as we have seen, *logos* was also, for the Stoics, the divine rational principle of the universe, the relationship extends to reality as a whole: reality is accessible by thought and language, and what can be said by rational beings is isomorphic with the rational structure of reality.

The Stoic account has often been associated with Frege's influential distinction between words, their sense (*Sinn*) and their reference (*Bedeutung*).[30] The parallelism is not straightforward, however, and has been rejected altogether, helpfully nuanced, or expanded and contextualized (Bobzien for example systematically argued that Frege "plagiarized on a large scale" the Stoics' logic and philosophy of language).[31]

There is much debate, moreover, on the origin and motivation of the Stoic introduction of the notion of *lekton*, and on the rationale for claiming that sayables are incorporeal. It has been argued, for example, that the *lekton* was originally a purely metaphysical notion which had its place in the Stoic theory of causation: "the notion of a fact, of an incorporeal item to be contrasted with the body it is a fact about … only in a second step got modified or construed in such a way as to serve … in logical or linguistic contexts".[32] As early as Cleanthes, the effects of causes seem to have been described as "predicables" (see §3.3) and *lekta*: the knife is the cause *to* the flesh *of* being cut; whereas the knife, the flesh, and their properties are all bodies, *being cut*, or *the fact that the flesh is cut*, are incorporeal entities (see Clement *Strom.* 8.9.26.3–4 = LS 55C; 8.9.30.1–3 = LS 55D).[33]

A related area of extensive scholarly debate focuses on which of the following views is correct:

- Sayables, albeit clearly different from thoughts and signifiers, are dependent on them and subsist only as long as the thoughts or linguistic expressions saying them do.[34]
- Sayables are mind-independent and language-independent entities which "are there" to get said, whether or not they are actually thought or said.[35]
- Sayables are parts of the basic furniture of Stoic reality, on a par with bodies, and complementary and interdependent with them: they are the "ontological structure of reality".[36]

The question of the ontological status of sayables requires careful nuancing, to avoid inadvertently conflating
p. 322 different positions. It is one thing to claim that the subsistence ↳ of sayables depends on the existence of certain linguistic expressions signifying them, whether at some time or at any given time; another to claim that sayables subsist in so far as there is some language which *can* signify them, even if many sayables will never be expressed, and perhaps *could* never be expressed by rational beings with finite capacities; another to claim that sayables would subsist even if there were no language and no thinker; yet another to claim that the subsistence of (all? some?) sayables is not only independent of language and thought, but does not supervene upon the existence of corporeal objects and their qualities either. This picture is further complicated by the fact that the Stoic immanent divine rational *logos* could (should?) be able to think, or to have thought when devising its providential plan, everything that happens or would happen (and could have happened?) in the universe, all of which should be "sayable."

3.3. Incomplete Sayables

The Stoics divided sayables into two classes: "incomplete" or "deficient" (*ellipê*) and "self-complete" (*autotelê*):

> **T5** Incomplete are those which have an unfinished expression, e.g. "writes." For we ask "Who?" Self-complete are those which have a finished expression, e.g. "Socrates writes."
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.63 = LS 33F)

"Predicables" (*katêgorêmata*, often also translated as "predicates"), which are typically signified by verbs, are the only examples of incomplete sayables in our sources.[37] The Stoics, beginning with Cleanthes, classified and wrote extensively about them.[38] The signification of a verb is determined by what, by uttering it, you can say or signify *about* something: for example, "to write" signifies something (writing) which can be said *of something* (e.g., Socrates); this predicable, writing, is an incomplete sayable because nothing complete gets said until it is attached to something else (Diogenes Laertius 7.64 = LS 33G).

What a predicable is to be attached to in order to form a complete sayable is a "case" (*ptôsis*) (Diogenes Laertius 7.64 = LS 33G). The Stoic notion of "case" is extremely controversial and raises several questions straying between grammar, semantics, and metaphysics. Are cases linguistic items, as the original grammatical use of the term "*ptôsis*" might suggest?[39] Or are they rather what is signified by proper names and appellatives (e.g., Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 11.29)? If the latter, what is the relationship between cases and peculiar and common qualities (see §3.1)? Are cases incomplete incorporeal *lekta*, as suggested by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 8.9.26.5 = LS 33O) and possibly by the example of Dion in **T1**?[40] On this reading, whereas "Dion" signifies an incorporeal case, it also refers to Dion (or, perhaps, to his peculiar quality) which "obtains" or "falls" under the case. However, what could be the signification of a proper name or demonstrative pronoun, distinct from their reference?

p. 323 The idea that the conjunction of an incorporeal case (signified, e.g., by "Socrates," "man," or "this") and an incorporeal incomplete predicable (signified, e.g., by "writes" or "is mortal") constitutes an incorporeal complete sayable (e.g., what is signified by "Socrates writes," "Man is mortal," "This is mortal," "Does Socrates write?") is more intuitive than the idea that a sayable can somehow be formed by attaching an incorporeal predicate to a corporeal case. Sometimes predicables are described as *parts* of complete sayables; this might suggest that cases are also parts of complete sayables, but the idea that something incorporeal (a complete sayable) may have corporeal and incorporeal parts seems problematic.[41]

3.4. Complete Sayables

Our sources report several lists of Stoic complete sayables (e.g., Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.72–5; Diogenes Laertius 7.65–8; Ammonius *Commentary on Aristotle's De interpretatione* 2.9–3.6). Complete sayables were classified on the basis of what you *do* by saying them through some linguistic expressions, for example:

- "Statables" or "assertibles" (*axiômata*) are sayables "saying which we make statements, and which are either true or false" (e.g., what we say when we utter "Dion is walking").[42]
- "Commands" are sayables "saying which we issue a command" (e.g., the sayable signified by "Come here, dear girl") (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.71–3).[43]

The Stoics distinguished other kinds of complete sayables;

- "questions," which require "yes" or "no" as an answer (e.g., "Is it day?");
- "inquiries," namely open questions requiring a discursive answer (e.g., "Where does Dion live?");
- "puzzlements," namely questions which do not require an answer (e.g., "Can it be that pain and life are akin?");
- "quasi-statables" or "more than statables," namely sayables that resemble statables, but in addition

express some sort of feeling (e.g., “How beautiful is the Parthenon!”);[44]

- “oaths” (e.g., “I shall not let them pass”);
- “prayers” (e.g., “Father Zeus, let Ajax gain victory and the glory that he prays for”);
- “invocations” (e.g., “O most glorious son of Atreus, Agamemnon”);
- “curses” (e.g., “May his brains pour out on the ground”);
- “hypotheses” (e.g., “Suppose that the earth is at the center of the sun’s sphere”);
- “expositions” (e.g., “Let this be a straight line”).[45]

The Stoic classification of complete sayables mirrors modern classifications of speech-acts, but complete
p. 324 sayables are not themselves speech-acts.[46] Each time we express a ↳ complete sayable we (1) utter a linguistic expression (“It is day”; “Is it day?”), (2) say the sayable signified by it (that it is day; whether it is day), and (3) perform a certain speech act (we make a statement or assertion, that it is day; we ask a question, whether it is day). The model by which we have a different type of sayable for each type of speech act separates the Stoics from the nowadays more popular view that different speech-acts can share the same propositional content and only differ in their “illocutionary” and “perlocutionary” forces (e.g., the assertion “The door is open,” the question “Is the door open?” and the command “Open the door” all have the same content).

Unlike Aristotle, who believed that all non-assertoric speech, which is not truth-apt, belongs to the realm of rhetoric and poetics, the Stoics included the study of all types of sayables in their dialectic.[47]

3.5. Statables (*axiômata*)

Stoic statables have often been associated with propositions: they are the primary bearers of truth and falsehood, and statements, sentences, and “impressions” are true or false derivatively, in virtue of expressing statables. In fact, statables are the *only* sayables which have a truth-value:

> **T6** a true statable is that which obtains and is contradictory of something; a false one is that which does not obtain and is contradictory of something.
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.85 = LS 34D)[48]

Although no statable exists, then, within the class of subsisting statables the Stoics drew a distinction between true statables, which “obtain” or “are the case” (*huparchein*) and false statables, which are not the case and thus merely subsist. In this respect, Stoic statables can be compared to some modern conceptions of states of affairs.

The Stoics subscribed to a “temporalized” version of the Principle of Bivalence: unlike propositions, statables are either true or false *at times*, and some statables change their truth values over time (*metapiptonta*).[49] For example, the statable expressed by “it is raining” is true now, while it is raining, will be false in one hour, when it will not be raining, and will become true again next time it will rain again.[50]

Stoic statables also differ from propositions in that they are tensed (“Socrates walked,” “Socrates is walking,” and “Socrates will walk” signify three different statables) and can contain token-reflexive elements: the sentence “I am now walking here,” uttered at different times by different speakers in different places might signify the same Stoic statable but different propositions (e.g., the propositions that Socrates is walking in a prison cell in Athens at 7.30 p.m. on the fourth day of the month of Skirophorion in 399 BCE and that Epicurus is walking in his garden in Athens at 1 p.m. on the fifth day of 301 BCE).[51]

p. 325 What makes a statable true, or false? The debate among Stoics, Epicureans, and Academics concerning the truth value of future contingent statements is instructive. In their defense of the universality of the Principle of Bivalence for statables, the Stoics claimed that the statable expressed by, for example, "Socrates will die from drinking hemlock" was already true well before Socrates started drinking and died, and in fact was true since the beginning of time. What made the statable already true at all times before Socrates's death was the presence in the world, at all times, of causes that would ultimately lead to Socrates's death from drinking hemlock, in line with the Stoics' radical determinism (e.g., Cicero *Fat.* 20–1 = LS 38G).[52] What exactly these causes are in the case of Socrates's death is difficult to imagine; but we know that for the Stoics causes are bodies, so the truth-maker of "Socrates will die from drinking hemlock" was corporeal.

It is easier to identify the corporeal truth-makers of other statables: the statable expressed by "Zeno is wise" was made true at all times in which Zeno was wise by Zeno's wisdom, a corporeal quality of Zeno's corporeal soul (Seneca *Ep.* 117.13 = LS 33E). Interpreting this truth-making relation as a robust form of causation would be inconsistent with the Stoic tenet that statables are incorporeal, and as such cannot be acted upon; but truth-making (and truth-changing) could have been understood as weaker relations, analogous to those relational properties of bodies, such as being a father or being on the right, which were included in the fourth Stoic "genus" (see Simplicius *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 166, 15–29 = LS 29C).

Statables are also bearers of modalities, namely possibility, impossibility, necessity, and non-necessity, of which Chrysippus advanced the discussion, already initiated by Aristotle and continued by the Megarians Diodorus Cronus and Philo in the second half of the fourth and first half of the third century BCE.[53]

3.6. Simple Statables

The Stoics embarked upon a sophisticated classification of statables, both "simple" (*hapla*) and "non-simple" (*ouch hapla*). Among simple statables[54] they distinguished (cf. Sextus Empiricus *Against the Logicians* 2.96–100; Diogenes Laertius 7.69–70):

- "Predicative" (*katêgorikon*) or "intermediate" (*meson*) statable, composed of a nominative case and a predicable, e.g., the statable expressed by "*Dion* is dead," which is false at all times in which Dion is alive, and becomes true from the moment of Dion's death.

- "Predicatory" (*katagoreutikon*) or "definite" (*hôrismenon*) statable, with a demonstrative subject accompanied by some act of ostension fixing the deictic reference (the pronouns "I" and "you" were also considered deictic), e.g., the statable expressed by "*this one* is walking." A definite statable is "destroyed" when the object of deixis no longer exists; for example, "this one is dead," where "this one" refers to Dion,
p. 326 is false at all times in which Dion is alive, and is "destroyed," namely ceases to ↳ subsist, at Dion's death (Alexander of Aphrodisias *Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics* 177, 25–33 = LS 38F).[55]

- "Indefinite" (*aoriston*) statable, governed by an "indefinite particle," e.g., the statable expressed by "*someone* is walking." An indefinite statable is true whenever a corresponding definite one (e.g., "this one is walking") is true.[56]

The Stoics also distinguished three forms of simple statables including a negation:

- "Negative" (*apophatikon*) statable, expressed by a sentence formed by pre-fixing the particle "not" (*ouch* or *ouchi*), e.g., "*Not*: Dion is walking." This "external" negation is truth-functional: if *p* is true, then not-*p* is false; if *p* is false, then not-*p* is true. A statable and its negation are contradictories (*antikeimena*), and the Principle of Excluded Middle holds good.[57]

- "Denying" (*arnêtikon*) statable, expressed by a sentence having a compound negative as subject, e.g., "*no one* is walking."

- "Privative" (*sterêtikon*) statable, expressed by a sentence having a privative particle prefixed to the predicable, e.g., "this one is *un*-kind."[58]

Notice that the external negation is not a connective, and thus the negation of a simple statable (e.g., the statable expressed by "Not: Dion is walking") counts as a simple statable. It is also worth highlighting that the statables signified by sentences in which the negation governs the predication (e.g., "Dion is *not* walking") counted as affirmations for the Stoics, who insisted that in "negations" the negative particle should have the broadest scope (e.g., Apuleius *De interpretatione* 177,17–31). This is a first clear example of the Stoics' regimentation of language with the purpose of disambiguating what kind of statable is expressed.

Not only does the external negation allow us to recognize immediately the type of statable expressed, but it also guarantees that if a statable is true (false) then its negation is false (true) and the Principle of Excluded Middle: when the subject X is empty both "X is F" and "X is not F" are false, because both statables have existential import (e.g., if Dion does not exist, both "Dion is walking" and "Dion is not walking" are false), whereas "Not: X is F" ("Not: Dion is walking") is true (Alexander of Aphrodisias *Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics* 402,1–36). This shows that the Stoic classification of statables was not guided by observation of existing linguistic structures, but by logical or metaphysical considerations.

3.7. Non-Simple Statables

The same point emerges in the Stoic classification of non-simple statables,[59] which are composed of two or more than two statables (or of two or more than two occurrences of the same statable) conjoined by one or
p. 327 more than one "connective." Chrysippus classified three types of non-simple statables: ↳

- "Conjunctive" (*sumpeplegmenon*) statable, expressed by a sentence of the form "both (*kai*) *p* and (*kai*) *q*" (with at least two conjuncts). Stoic conjunction is truth-functional, and a conjunctive statable is true if and only if all the conjuncts are true (Diogenes Laertius 7.72; Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.125, 8.128).

- "Conditional" (*sunêmmenon*) statable, of the form "if (*ei* or *eiper*) *p*, *q*," where *p* is the "antecedent" and *q* is the "consequent." Unlike in the analyses of conditionals offered by the Dialecticians Philo and Diodorus Cronus, and possibly accepted by the early Stoics, Chrysippus's conditional is not truth-functional. A conditional is true when there is a relation of "following" (*akolouthia*) between antecedent and consequent, and for Chrysippus such a relation obtains only when there is "connectedness" (*sunartêsis*) among them, and the negation of the consequent is in "conflict" (*machê*) with the antecedent (Diogenes Laertius 7.73; Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.110–2).[60]

- "Disjunctive" (*diezeugmenon*) statable, of the form "Either (*êtoi*) *p* or (*ê*) *q*" (with at least two disjuncts). Chrysippus's disjunction is exclusive and not truth-functional: a disjunction is true when the disjuncts are in "complete conflict" (*machê teleia*) with one another, and thus one and only one of them is true (Diogenes Laertius 7.72; Gellius *NA* 16.8.13).[61]

The truth-conditions of Chrysippus's conditional and disjunction are established with reference to the concept of "conflict." Two statables *p* and *q* are in ("incomplete") conflict when *they cannot be true together*; the conflict is "complete" when their negations ¬*p* and ¬*q* are also in mutual conflict, and therefore *p* and *q cannot be false together* either (cf. Galen *Institutio logica* 14.5). Our evidence is frustratingly thin but suggests that it is not sufficient that *p* (or *q*) is impossible to conclude that *p* and *q* "cannot be true *together*." For example, although "This square has precisely three sides" is impossible, there is no conflict between it and "London is in England," since the two statables are not *incompatible* and *could have been true together*—if squares had in fact three sides.

Similarly, the notion of "connectedness" excludes that a conditional be true merely in virtue of the fact that its consequent is true or necessary, or that its antecedent is false or impossible. Chrysippus's conditional thus

avoids the so-called paradoxes of material Philonian implication (*ex falso quodlibet*) and of strict implication and of the Diodorean conditional (*ex impossibili quodlibet*): there must be a strong connection, logical or causal (loosely speaking), between the antecedent and the consequent, such that if the antecedent is (or *were*) true, then the consequent *must* also be (or *would* also *have to be*) true *in virtue of the truth of the antecedent*.[62] For Chrysippus, weaker links, such as the constant regularities expressed by divinatory "theorems," should be expressed as negated conjunctions, e.g., "not: both *p* and *q*" ("Not: someone was born at the rising of the Dogstar and he will die at sea"), and not as conditionals, e.g., "if *p*, then not-*q*" ("If someone was born at the rising of the Dogstar, he will not die at sea") (Cicero, *Fat.* 12–15 = LS 38E).

Some Stoics after Chrysippus identified other types of non-simple statables (Diogenes Laertius 7.71–4; Gellius
p. 328 *NA* 16.8.13–14): ↳

- the "paraconditional" (*parasunêmmenon*), of the form "Since (*epei*) *p*, *q*," which is true when the conditional "If *p*, then *q*" is true and *p* is true;
- the "causal" (*aitiôdes*), "Because of (*dioti*) *p*, *q*," which is true when the conditional "If *p*, then *q*" is true, *p* is true, and *p* is the cause or ground of *q*;
- the "para-disjunctive" (*paradiezeugmenon*), of the form "Either *p* or *q*," which is true when *p* and *q* are in incomplete conflict (and thus cannot both be true, but could both be false), or when their negations ¬*p* and ¬*q* are in incomplete conflict (and thus *p* and *q* cannot both be false, but could both be true);
- the "comparative" (*diasaphoun*), "More (*mallon*) *p* than (*ê*) *q*," which presumably is true when the disjunction "Either *p* or *q*" is true and *p* is true, and "Less (*hêtton*) *p* than (*ê*) *q*," which presumably is true when the disjunction "Either *p* or *q*" is true and *p* is false.[63]

The formulation of all types of non-simple statables is standardized, and the main connective is always placed at the beginning of the sentence, to disambiguate what type of statable is expressed.[64] Consider, for example, the sentence "*p* and *q* or *r*"; the Stoic regimentation removes any ambiguity, since the sentence will be formulated either as "Both *p* and either *q* or *r*" (a conjunction having a simple statable and a disjunctive statable as its conjuncts) or as "Either both *p* and *q* or *r*" (a disjunction having a conjunctive statable and a simple statable as its disjuncts). As Bobzien has remarked, then, "the Stoic method of pre-fixing connectives can in general perform the function brackets have in modern logic" (and, we should add, which the letters K, A, and C have in the Polish notation).[65]

There is a sense in which the truth-conditions of non-simple statables clearly establish the meanings of the connectives used in them. We are sometimes told that the connectives "announce" (*epangellesthai*) certain things: for example, "if" announces "that the second follows from the first" (Diogenes Laertius 7.71).[66] Whether connectives thereby signify something, and whether what they signify is an incomplete *lekton*, our evidence does not allow us to establish.[67]

3.8. Arguments as Systems of Statables

The Stoics, and in particular Chrysippus, made the largest contribution to propositional logic in antiquity. The three main types of non-simple statable, namely conditional, disjunction, and (negated) conjunction, are the foundation of the Stoic syllogistic theory, forming the "leading premisses" of the five "indemonstrable" syllogisms."[68] For the Stoics, an "argument" (*logos*) is a "system" or "compound" of premisses (two or more) and one conclusion (Diogenes Laertius 7.4 5).[69] Typically, both premisses and conclusion are statables.[70] Stoic arguments are thus systems of incorporeal sayables signified by uttered or written signifiers. This raises the fascinating question whether arguments themselves were conceived as subsistent entities wholly independent of human thought and language (see §3.3).

p. 329 This conception of argument also has implications for Stoic logical theory: for example, there is no attested example of a Stoic argument in which the same statable occurs more than once as a premiss (e.g., "*p or r, p, p*; therefore ¬*r*"), and an explanation for this could be that two separate utterances or inscriptions of the same sentence would express just one single statable in the argument.

Another interesting question raised by the status of Stoic arguments as systems of incorporeal sayables is that of the criteria for identity of arguments. Our sources mention a class of "sub-syllogistic" (*huposullogistikoi*) arguments which are "equipollent" to the corresponding syllogisms but are not formulated in the standard syllogistic form (Alexander of Aphrodisias *Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics* 84, 12–14; 373, 28–35; Galen *Institutio logica* 19.6). For example, whereas an argument of the form

> If *p*, then *q*; but *p*; therefore *q*

is syllogistic (in the form of a Stoic "first indemonstrable"), an argument of the form

> *q* follows from *p*; but *p*; therefore *q*

is merely sub-syllogistic. The implication seems to be that *two different*, albeit equipollent (namely, presumably, logically equivalent) *arguments* are expressed; but for that to be the case, sentences of the form "If *p*, then *q*" and "*q* follows from *p*" must express different statables. On interpretations according to which statables, even non-simple ones, are states of affairs, and not linguistic meanings or intensions, this implication is difficult to justify. Alternatively, our sources could have misrepresented the Stoic position: in our example, it is one and the same argument that can have two *linguistic formulations*, a syllogistic and a sub-syllogistic one, and it is these two formulations (rather than two distinct arguments) that are equipollent, exactly in the sense that they signify one and the same argument.[71]

Analogous questions are raised by the Stoic treatment of universal (*katholika*) definitions (e.g., "man is a rational mortal animal"), which were taken to be equivalent to universally quantified sentences (e.g., "all men are rational mortal animals"). The Stoics suggested that definitions should be expressed differently, as indefinite conditionals (e.g., "if something is a man, that thing is a rational mortal animal") despite the fact that the two "syntactically" different expressions "mean the same" (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 11.8–11 = LS 30I; see also Epictetus *Diss.* 2.20.2–3). Since the single thing expressed is, presumably, a statable, then the Peripatetic

> (1) All men are rational mortal animals
>
> (2) Socrates is a man
>
> (3) Therefore, Socrates is a rational mortal animal

and the Stoic

p. 330

> (1*) If something is a man, that thing is a rational mortal animal
>
> (2) Socrates is a man
>
> (3) Therefore, Socrates is a rational mortal animal

would appear to be two formulations of one and the same argument.[72] Why then insist on the conditional formulation (1*)? Here, once again, what lies behind the Stoic regimentation of language is a desire to manifest precisely what *lekta* are being expressed and the ontological structure of what is being referred to: "man is a rational mortal animal" might incorrectly suggest that something is predicated of a certain generic or universal object, Man. For the Stoics, however, a universal is a "not-something" or a "quasi-something," a mere construct of the human mind: the universal man neither exists nor subsists.[73] "If something is a man, that thing is a

rational mortal animal," on the contrary, correctly displays the fact that to be a man is to have a certain property, which, as we have seen, the Stoics conceived of as a corporeal "common quality." In addition, the conditional (1*) lacks the existential import that the definition "Man is a rational mortal animal" might appear to carry, and that the universal affirmation (1) did carry in Aristotle's logic. In this sense, then, although the two previously provided formulations might be taken to express the same argument, there are readings of (1) on which (1) expresses a different statable than (1*), thereby making the two arguments signified also different, since (1), unlike (1*), is ambiguous.

4. Ambiguity

The ambiguity of language was central to Plato's and Aristotle's conception of fallacies and sophistical arguments.[74] Dealing with ambiguities was for the Stoics a key function of dialectic: "Without the study of dialectic the wise man will not be infallible in argument, since dialectic distinguishes the true from the false, and clarifies what is merely plausible and what is stated ambiguously (*to amphibolôs legomenon*)" (Diogenes Laertius 7.46–8; see also Cicero *Luc.* 91 and Philo *On Agriculture* 15–16).

The Stoics discussed ambiguity under the heading of "signifiers," because only linguistic expressions (*lexeis*) can be ambiguous; but a reference to their multiple significations is necessary to describe and explain the phenomenon. The Stoics defined ambiguity (*amphibolia*) as follows:

> **T7** An ambiguity is an expression (*lexis*) signifying two or even more things (*pragmata*), linguistically, strictly, and in the same usage, so that several things are understood simultaneously in relation to this expression.
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.62 = LS 37P)[75]

The final clause should not be taken to mean that an expression is ambiguous only when, within a certain context of utterance, it happens to be understood in two (or more than two) different ways, for example by the
p. 331 speaker and the audience. The *possibility* of multiple ↳ understandings is a consequence of the objective ambiguity of the linguistic expression, which actually signifies multiple things "linguistically, strictly, and in the same usage."[76]

Two sources, Galen's *On Linguistic Sophisms* (chapter 4) and Aelius Theon's *Preliminary Exercises*, report the Stoics' classification of linguistic ambiguities into seven or eight distinct kinds.[77] These include:

- ambiguity due to the homonymy of a single word (e.g., *andreios*, which means either "brave" or "for men," "appropriate to men");
- ambiguity due to the fact that the parts of a linguistic expression can be divided or combined in different ways (e.g., *aulêtrispêptoken*, which can be parsed as *aulêtris pêptoken*—"a flutegirl fell"—or *aulê tris pêptoken*—"a court has fallen thrice");
- ambiguity due to the omission of a certain word (e.g., "Whose are you?", which means either "Of what *father* are you the son/daughter?" or "Of what *master* are you the slave?").
- various forms of syntactical ambiguity (e.g., "*eiê Melêton Sokratên nikêsai*," which means "may Meletus defeat Socrates" or "may Socrates defeat Meletus").

Here is an example of how linguistic ambiguity could be exploited sophistically (Simplicius *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* 24, 9–21):

> (E1) "The tunic is *andreios*"

> (E2) “What is *andreios* is stout-hearted”
>
> (E3) “Therefore, the tunic is stout-hearted”

Since the adjective *andreios* is ambiguous, the linguistic expressions (E1) and (E2) signify multiple statables:

> (A1a) The tunic is for men
>
> (A1b) The tunic is courageous
>
> (A2a) What is for men is stout-hearted
>
> (A2b) What is courageous is stout-hearted

This is true even in a context in which (E1) and (E2) are uttered by a speaker who clearly *means*, by them, the true statables (A1a) and (A2b), and not the false (A1b) and (A2a). The fact that within the pragmatics of communication the audience would easily understand what the speaker intended by (E1) and (E2) does not make these expressions any less ambiguous. A sophistic arguer could thus “transfer the ambiguous word to another signification,” inferring the absurd conclusion

> (A3) The tunic is stout-hearted

as if his interlocutor had meant (A1b) or (A2a). A Stoic logician familiar with the phenomenon of ambiguity, and with the specific ambiguity of *andreios*, will be able to defuse the sophism; since what he *said* was actually
p. 332 (A1a)+(A2b), the inference to (A3) ↳ is invalid.[78] Remember that “speech” (*logos*), unlike “expression” (*lexis*), is what issues from the speaker’s thought (see §3.1), and that the things we say subsist “in correspondence to a rational impression” (see §3.2).

Chrysippus went so far as to claim that *every* expression is “by nature ambiguous” (Gellius *NA* 11.12.1 = LS 37N; Augustine *De Dial.* 9). Some interpreters have conjectured that Chrysippus was referring to the fact every (significant) expression is as a matter of fact ambiguous, since it signifies both itself, autonymously, and something else.[79] Ancient Greek did not have anything like quotation marks to disambiguate between the use and mention of a word or phrase (the neuter article could play such a function, but could itself be ambiguous between this function and the article function, for example when associated with neuter nouns). A fallacious confusion between use and mention could thus be diagnosed as a form of ambiguity (Diogenes Laertius 7.187 = LS 37R):

> (1) If you say something, it comes out of your mouth.
>
> (2) You say “wagon.”
>
> (3) Therefore, a wagon comes out of your mouth.

The analysis of this argument must have been for Chrysippus a way to illustrate central points in his philosophy of language, such as the distinction between signifiers and what they signify, and his theory of ambiguity. Presumably Chrysippus would have explained that “wagon” can either mean “the word ‘wagon’ ” or the object signified by it (a wagon): what comes out of one’s mouth is what one utters (*laleis*), namely some air struck by one’s phonatory organs (see §3.1). Clement of Alexandria attests to what is apparently the same argument (with “house” in place of “wagon”) but reports a different solution: what we say is not a house, but an incorporeal case (*Strom.* 8.9.26.5 = LS 33O). But if what we “say” (here *legein* is used) is an incorporeal meaning, then (1) becomes false, and the argument unsound, since incorporeals can hardly come out of one’s mouth.[80]

It is debatable whether autonymy was the issue that Chrysippus had in mind when he claimed that all expressions are ambiguous. Gellius's report pits Chrysippus's view that "every word is ambiguous by nature, since two or more meanings can be understood from it" against Diodorus Cronus's claim that *no* word is ambiguous, because words have only whatever meaning they are given by the speaker on the particular occasion of utterance (Gellius *NA* 11.12.1–3 = LS 37N).[81] According to Diodorus, since the meaning of an utterance is constituted by speaker-meaning, no utterance can ever ambiguous, because the speaker only means one thing at a given time; utterances can still be "obscure," of course, if the chosen words are unlikely to succeed in conveying the speaker's intended meaning to the audience. If Chrysippus was reacting against Diodorus's conventionalism, then the answer that all language is ambiguous because of autonymous signification missed the mark.[82] What Chrysippus could have meant is, instead, that *in principle* any linguistic expression *could* be ambiguous, whether it is in fact ambiguous or not, since any expression *could* have come to have multiple significations in a certain language. This view that by their very nature all linguistic expressions
p. 333 can acquire multiple meanings (not just idiosyncratic one) need not be incompatible with the view, ↳ which we have seen in §2, that some words are naturally best suited to signify certain things.

The Stoics devoted a great deal of attention to the "Sorites" or "Heap" paradox, which had been devised by the Megarian Eubulides and was used by the Stoics' skeptical adversaries to undermine their epistemological optimism. The reconstruction of Chrysippus's solution is debated.[83] It is however clear is that the issue was *not* the ambiguity of single words like "heap" or "few."

5. Stoic Grammar

Although no part of Stoic philosophy was labeled "grammar," the Stoics initiated the study of important parts of what we call "traditional grammar," which includes phonology, morphology, syntax, parts of speech and their features (this was labeled "technical" or "methodical" grammar in the Hellenistic period).[84] The Stoics distinguished, for example, between moods of verbs, and elaborated a theory of tenses.[85] They made a semantic distinction between "active," "passive," and "neuter" predicables which was influenced by linguistic observations and would in turn influence the later grammatical distinction between verbal voices (Diogenes Laertius 7.64). Not only is the Stoic classification of signifiers and parts of speech (see §3.2) relevant to grammar, but also the discussion of how simple and compound *lekta* are structured (see §3.3–§3.7) contributed to the development of syntax in later antiquity.[86] The exact extent of these contributions is difficult to pinpoint, given the scarcity of evidence about grammar outside the Stoic school in the Hellenistic age.[87] Dionysius Thrax was the first to write about technical grammar between the second and first century BCE, but his principles are sometimes incompatible with Stoic theory, while Apollonius Dyscolus, who was clearly influenced by the Stoic approach, authored the first extant treatise on syntax in the second century CE.[88]

6. Conclusion

In the late-antiquity debate as to whether logic was a *part* (*meros*) or a *tool* (*organon*) of philosophy, the Stoics supported the first position and were pitted against Aristotle's followers. Although the early Stoic interest in logic and language was born, like Plato's and Aristotle's, within the concrete practice of philosophical debate, Chrysippus transformed Stoic dialectic into a systematic study of all the aspects of rational discourse, from the foundations of grammar, syntax, and semantics to the theory of validity, syllogistic, and demonstration. The breadth and sophistication of this study confirms that the Stoic investigations into language and logic went beyond their instrumental value: studying our *logos* is part of our duty to use our *logos* to understand reality.

p. 334 Several times in this chapter I have already drawn attention to the Stoics' emphasis on the correct use of language, exemplified by the classification of types of sayables (§3.4), by the demand that the negation and the

connectives be always prefixed to the sentence expressing a certain statable (§3.6 and §3.7), by the distinction between canonical and sub-standard formulations of arguments (§3.8), and by the classification of linguistic ambiguity (§4). The Stoic interest in the regimentation of language was much maligned in antiquity. The ancient charge that the Stoics paid too much attention to "words," and not enough to the "things themselves" (e.g., Alexander of Aphrodisias *Commentary on Aristotle's Prior Analytics* 84, 12–19; Galen *Institutio Logica* 3.2 and 3.5), misses the mark, but was reiterated by many modern critics of the Stoics' empty "formalism."[89] This perception changed only when a revival of the study of Stoic philosophy of language and logic was prompted in the twentieth century by a fresh appreciation of their nature and aims, spurred by the modern development of propositional logic.[90]

For the Stoics, it is precisely because we should pay attention to the "things themselves" that we should learn to talk about them correctly; and we will learn to do so only if we pay attention to reality itself: for example to the essential difference between corporeal objects and properties, incorporeal sayables, and universal "not-somethings," or to the essential difference between the relations of conflict, consequence, or mere conjunction subsisting among states of affairs.

The Stoics' immense interest in language and logic (*logikê*) is in line with their anthropology, theology and metaphysics: as human beings, we have been providentially endowed with reason and language (*logos*), which we are meant to cultivate in order to understand the rational order of the universe, planned by divine reason (*logos*). The Stoic ideal "sage" is "the only true dialectician," and thus the only true logician—and, we could add, the only true philosopher of language.[91]

Notes

1. For an overview, see Modrak 2009; Castagnoli and Di Lascio 2012.

2. For analysis of the Stoics' theory of language within the context of their logic, see Gourinat 2000; for an extensive overview, see, together, Barnes 1999, Schenkeveld 1999, and Bobzien 1999; for shorter overviews, see Mates 1961: 11–57; Kneale and Kneale 1962: 138–59. For in-depth analysis of the Stoic theory of *lekta* (see §3), with all its ramifications for the Stoic theory of language and philosophy, see Bronowski 2019.

3. A selective collection of relevant sources, with English translations and commentaries, is provided in LS, especially in §26–§27 and §31–§39. For a more extensive collection, with German translations and notes, see Hülser 1987–8.

4. For the Stoic tripartition of philosophy, see Ierodiakonou 1993; Gourinat 2000: 20–34; Bronowski 2019: chapter 1.

5. Caston, this volume.

6. On this distinction, see, e.g., Assaturian 2022.

p. 335 7. According to the Stoics, although reason is already recognizable in a child of age seven (Aetius 4.11.4 = LS 39E), the full maturity of human *logos* is reached after the age of fourteen (Diogenes Laertius 7.55 = LS 33H).

8. On Augustine's testimony, see Long 2005. For the view that the second mechanism is not Stoic, see, e.g., Schenkeveld 1999: 181.

9. On this distinction, see Allen 2005.

10. On the catalog of Chrysippus's logical works, see Barnes 1996.

11. The definition of dialectic as "the science of what is true, what is false, and what is neither" is attributed to the Stoic Posidonius at Diogenes Laertius 7.62. On the Stoic definitions and conception of dialectic, see Gourinat 2000: 69–107, 321–9; Castagnoli 2010.

12. According to Diogenes Laertius (7.41, 62), some Stoics also distinguished a part of logic on "definitions," whereas others

included definitions within that subsection of "dialectic" which focuses on "signifiers" (see later in the chapter). On the theory of definition, see Crivelli 2010. The discussion of "canons and criteria," epistemology, was also treated by some Stoics as a separate branch of logic (Diogenes Laertius 7.41–2). For an overview of the scant evidence for the Stoic views on rhetoric, see Atherton 1988; Gourinat 2000: 35–45.

13. Written inscriptions, which can be seen and read, would also count as signifiers.

14. The framework of reference for signification must be here the Greek language (see in **T1**, the reference to the "foreigners" who do not speak Greek). Of course, "*blituri*" could be meaningful in some other language.

15. Cf. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.80: "saying, they say, is producing an utterance which means the thing *which is being thought*"; Galen *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* 5.242: "speech (*logos*), being given its significance and as it were *stamped by the thoughts* of the intellect …" According to Chrysippus, not only parrots but also infants who are only just starting to speak "do not speak but, as it were, 'speak' (*ut loqui*)" (Varro *Ling.* 6.7.56). On the relations between speech and thought, see, e.g., Barnes 1993 and Assaturian 2022.

16. Greek articles are declinable; they distinguish the gender and number of nouns. According to Diogenes Laertius 7.57, Antipater added the *mesotês*, but it is not clear whether this refers to adverbs or participles.

17. On Stoic signifiers, see, e.g., Schenkenveld 1999; Gourinat 2000: 137–59; Long 2006.

18. On *lekta*, see especially Long 1971, Barnes 1993, Frede 1994 and Bronowski 2019.

19. On the incorporeality and subsistence of *lekta*, see, e.g., Bailey 2014; Bronowski 2019: chapter 3 and chapter 6.

20. Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.

21. Barnes 1993; 1999: 194–7. The object in the example is corporeal (Dion); but "bearers" must include incorporeals (e.g., the bearers of the signifiers "void" and "sayable").

22. Ackrill's translation, slightly modified.

23. See Aristotle *Soph. el.* 1 for an alternative account which makes the link between words and things direct.

24. The Epicureans (and some later Peripatetics, such as Strato) did away with intermediates, admitting only two corporeal items in their theory of signification: utterances and objects (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.13; Plutarch *Adv. Col.* 1119F = LS 19K).

25. Long 1971: 77.

26. Frede 1994: 119.

27. Translation from LS.

28. See also Diogenes Laertius 7.63 = LS 33F.

p. 336 29. See, e.g., Barnes 1999: 212–13. The qualification "at least in principle" reflects the limitations of human reason: there might be things that can be said but as human beings we could never be able to think or say.

30. See, e.g., Mates 1961: 19–26.

31. Rejected by e.g. Frede 1994: 118–21; nuanced by e.g. Gaskin 1997; expanded and contextualized by Bobzien 2021.

32. Frede 1994: 113.

33. Cf. also Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 9.211 (= LS 55B) and Stobaeus *Flor.* 1.138–9 (= LS 55A), suggesting that for Zeno the corporeal quality of prudence is the cause to the soul of the incorporeal being prudent.

34. *pace* Nuchelmans 1973: 52. See, e.g., Long 1971: 94–8; Graeser 1978: 89–97; Sluiter 2000; Alessandrelli 2013. Commentators often support this sort of interpretation through certain readings of claims made in **T1** ("subsists *upon* our thought," *paraphustamenon dianoiai*) and **T4** ("subsists *in virtue of* a rational impression," *kata logikên phantasian huphistamenon*; see also Diogenes Laertius 7.63 = LS 33F; Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.70).

35. See, e.g., Barnes 1993, Frede 1994, Schubert 1994.

36. Bronowski 2019.

37. For compounded predicables, signified by a complex expression (e.g., “to drink absinthe”), see Bobzien and Shogry 2020: 9.

38. See, e.g., Barnes 1999: 204–6.

39. See, e.g., Atherton 1993: 279–84, Alessandrelli 2013: 137–54.

40. For a negative answer, see, e.g., Long 1971, Frede 1987b, Schubert 1994; for a qualified negative answer, see Frede 1994: 126–7; for a positive answer, see, e.g., Gaskin 1997, Durand 2018: chapter 2.

41. On predicables and cases, see Frede 1994; Gaskin 1997; Bronowski 2019: chapter 7 to chapter 9; on predicables as functions, see Bobzien and Shogry 2020.

42. I will use the translation “statable(s)” henceforth, but “assertible(s)” is also used frequently in the Anglophone literature. According to a different account, “a statable is a complete sayable that can be asserted as far as itself is concerned” (Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.104; see also Diogenes Laertius 7.65). As Bobzien (1999: 93–4) has suggested, the clause “as far as itself is concerned” could rule out the objection that some statables might be too complex for someone to think or state.

43. On the sophisticated discussion of commands in Chrysippus’s *Logical Investigations*, see Barnes 1986.

44. On this class of sayables, see Bobzien 2021: 167–71.

45. On quasi-statables, see Bobzien 2021: 167–71. On Stoic hypotheses, see Bobzien 1997.

46. See Schenkeveld 1984.

47. On the Stoic notion and classification of complete sayables, see, e.g., Schenkeveld 1984; Barnes 1999; Gourinat 2000: 182–93; Hülser 2012.

48. See also *Math.* 8.10. This raises interesting questions concerning the truth-aptness of other complete sayables like oaths, quasi-statables, hypotheses, and expositions (see §3.4).

49. On the Stoic version of the principle of bivalence, see Barnes 2007: chapter 1.

50. Crivelli, this volume.

51. This is complicated by the fact that for the Stoics the pronoun “I” is deictic, and utterances of the form “This is F” accompanied by deixis to different objects seem to have expressed different statables. On deictic reference, see §3.6.

p. 337 52. On this argument, and Stoic determinism more generally, see Bobzien 1998, esp. chapter 2. See also Meyer, this volume.

53. On Stoic modalities, see Bobzien 1993 and Crivelli, this volume.

54. On the Stoic classification of simple statables, see Brunschwig 1994.

55. See Papazian 2001; Barnes 2007: 39–48. On demonstrative pronouns and *deixis* in Stoicism, see Durand 2019. The idea that a statable can cease to subsist raises interesting questions about the incorporeality of statables; even admitting that incorporeals can perish, one could object that for something to be destroyed it needs to be somehow *acted upon*. For example one could suggest that it must be something like the corporeal state of Dion (his heart no longer beating) that *causes* the incorporeal statable “This one is dead” to perish, in a way incompatible with the Stoic theory of causation (see, e.g., Barnes 1999: 210–11).

56. See Bobzien 1999: 97–101. On the semantics of the subjects of the types of Stoic simple statables, namely proper and common nouns, demonstrative pronouns and indefinite pronouns, see Durand 2018. See Crivelli, this volume for discussion of truth-conditions for definite and indefinite statables.

57. A “hyper-negation” (*hyperapophatikon*), namely the negation of a negation (e.g., “not: not: it is day”), counts as a negation (Diogenes Laertius 7.69).

58. On Stoic negation, see Cavini 1985.

59. For an overview, see Bobzien 1999: 103–15. See also Ebert 1993.

60. Crivelli, this volume.

61. See Barnes 2005.

62. This also suggests that the "thesis of Aristotle" at the heart of modern "connexive" logics, according to which no proposition implies, or is implied by, its own contradictory (McCall 1966, 1967), held true of Chrysippus's conditional. See Bobzien 1996: 183–8; Nasti de Vincentis 2002 and 2006; Castagnoli 2009.

63. See Sluiter 1988.

64. The only exceptions are the two (post-Chrysippean) forms of paradisjunction, which cannot be distinguished from each other and from disjunction by their linguistic formulation.

65. Bobzien 1999: 104.

66. In Sextus Empiricus, however, we are told that it is the conditional statable (or the "construction of the conditional"), and not the connective "if," that makes the announcement (*Pyr.* 2.148; *Math.* 8.111). See also Apollonius Dyscolus *On Connectives* 214.14–16 on the "announcement" made by a disjunctive connective (and Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.191 for the announcement made by a disjunctive statable).

67. The Stoic Posidonius argued against some people (Peripatetics?) who thought that connectives do not "show" anything in their own right, but only bind the expression together (Apollonius Dyscolus *On Connectives* 214.4–6). On connectives, see Barnes 2007: chapter 3.

68. For an overview of Stoic syllogistic, see Crivelli, this volume; in-depth presentations in Mates 1961, Frede 1974, Bobzien 1996 and Gourinat 2000.

69. The existence of single-premiss arguments was supported by the Stoic Antipater (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.443).

70. On hypothetical arguments, in which one premiss is not a statable but a hypothesis, see Bobzien 1997.

71. For this suggestion see Barnes 2007: 314–21. The suggestion could be supported by two titles in the catalog of Chrysippus's work at Diogenes Laertius 7.194: "On arranging the same argument in multiple modes" and "Against the
p. 338 denials of the fact that the same ↳ argument can be arranged in a syllogistic and in a non-syllogistic mode." On sub-syllogistic arguments more generally see Ruge 2024.

72. On Stoic universals, indefinite conditionals, indefinite conjunctions, anaphora and quantification, see Crivelli 1994a; Caston 1999; Bobzien and Shogry 2020.

73. The "Not-someone" or "Nobody" (*outis*) argument (e.g., Diogenes Laertius 7.187)—(1) If someone is in Athens, he is not in Megara; (2) Man is in Athens; (3) Therefore, not man is in Megara—was presumably used by Chrysippus to show the absurd consequences of treating the universal man as "someone" or "something," like the Platonists did (see, e.g., Caston 1999: 200–4).

74. For an overview, see Castagnoli 2023.

75. Atherton's translation, slightly modified.

76. The meaning of these three qualifications is unclear. For in-depth analysis, see Atherton 1993: 152–69.

77. On Galen's testimony about the Stoic theory, see Edlow 1977, Ebbesen 1981, Atherton 1993: 175–405 and Schiaparelli 2002.

78. For analysis of the argument, and comparison with Aristotle's account of the fallacy of homonymy, see Atherton 1993: 414–50, Bobzien 2005 and Fait 2023.

79. See, e.g., Atherton 1993: 289–310.

80. Atherton, who believes that Stoic cases are corporeal linguistic items, thinks that Clement's report is incorrect (1993: 285–6). Similarly, but for different reasons, Frede (1994: 22), who believes that cases are corporeal qualities of the referents of the word.

81. Diodorus named some of his slaves after Greek particles and conjunctions (e.g., "*Alla Mên*," "However") to make a point for linguistic conventionalism (Ammonius *Commentary on Aristotle's De interpretatione* 38, 17–20 = LS 37O).

82. The reference to "more than two" meanings is difficult to explain on the autonymy reading.

83. See, e.g., Barnes 1982, Williamson 1994: 8–27, Bobzien 2002.

84. See Frede 1987a; Blank and Atherton 2003. On the influence of Stoicism on the development of ancient grammar, see Ildefonse 1997.

85. See Frede 1993; Crivelli 1994b.

86. A Stoic distinction which was not adopted by later grammarians is that between name and appellative, which was based on the ontological distinction between types of qualities (see §3.1).

87. For reservations about the suggestion that the Stoics influenced the "anomalist" or "anti-analogist" approach in the Pergamene school of grammar, see Blank and Atherton 2003: 318–20.

88. See Frede 1987b.

89. See especially Prantl 1855.

90. See especially Łukasiewicz 1935.

91. And the only true rhetorician (see Philodemus *On Rhetoric* 1.346).

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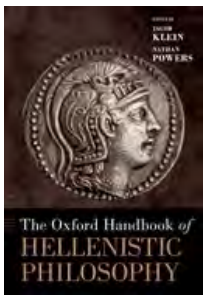
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CHAPTER

15 Stoic Logic

Paolo Crivelli

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Abstract

This chapter surveys the comprehensive logical system developed by the Stoic Chrysippus and his circle, a system that anticipates basic elements of modern propositional logic. It considers the Stoic classification of "statables" and the truth-conditions of each kind of statable, paying special attention to the Hellenistic debate about the truth-conditions of "if-then" statables, as well as to the Stoic conceptions of conflict, modality, and validity. It concludes with a survey of Stoic syllogistic, which resembles the modern calculus of sequents: all syllogisms are arguments; some syllogisms are regarded as basic (they are called "indemonstrables"); the others are derived by means of certain rules of inference (which are called "posits"); both indemonstrables and posits are described in a purely syntactic fashion.

Keywords: Stoics, Chrysippus, truth-condition, logic, validity, syllogism, modality, argument, indemonstrable, posit

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Commentators of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries chastised Stoic logic as dull and uninteresting. Its revaluation, due mainly to the pioneering studies of Jan Łukasiewicz and Benson Mates, was made possible by the development of propositional logic, which enabled historians to attain a better grasp of what the Stoics were up to.[1]

As in most parts of Stoicism, the state of the sources is dire: no logical work of any Stoic has been handed down to us in a readable state, and many witnesses are hostile to the Stoics.[2] In this exposition I restrict myself to outlining some views which can be plausibly attributed to Chrysippus and his immediate followers.[3]

1. The Logical Part of Philosophy

Most Stoics divide the logical part of philosophy into two sections: rhetoric and dialectic.[4] They then divide dialectic into two subsections: one dealing with what signifies, the other with what is signified.[5]

The study of what signifies is concerned with utterances (*phônê*). It covers topics like articulate utterances, the parts of speech, solecism, barbarism, poems, ambiguity, euphony, and musicality.[6] The study of what is signified by utterances deals mainly with impressions (*phantasiai*) and sayables (*lekta*).

2. Sayables, Existence, and Subsistence

Sextus Empiricus reports three ancient views about the bearers of truth or falsehood. He says that according to some thinkers they belong to the sphere of what is signified, according to others to that of utterances, according to yet others to that of mental events. He attributes the first position to the Stoics and the second to
p. 344 the Epicureans and Strato ↳ of Lampsacus while describing the third as a scholarly invention. He then goes on to testify that the Stoics distinguish three interconnected domains: the domains of what signifies, of what is signified, and of bearers. Whatever signifies is an utterance; bearers are the "real things in the world" which utterances are about (they are called "bearers" because they bear utterances); and what is signified includes sayables. Utterances are bodies, bearers are (in most cases) bodies, but sayables are incorporeal.[7]

As the term "sayable" suggests, sayables can be said. To say a sayable is to produce an utterance that signifies it.[8] For instance, the sayable «DIO IS-WALKING», signified by an utterance of the sentence "Dio is walking," is said by the speaker who produced the utterance.[9]

Since sayables are incorporeal, and since what exists coincides with the corporeal, sayables do not exist.[10] Nevertheless, they are something (*ti*) and they subsist (*huphistasthai*). Sayables enjoy this special status of being something that does not exist but subsists together with place, void, and time.[11] Although all sayables can be said, some are never said. The subsistence of sayables does not depend on their being actually said.

Sayables can not only be said, but also grasped in thought. This circumstance plays a role in linguistic communication: if a speaker says a certain sayable by producing an utterance of a sentence that signifies it, then a listener who comprehends the utterance (thanks to his or her knowing the language to which the sentence belongs) will grasp the sayable that is signified, while a listener who does not comprehend the utterance (for instance, because he or she does not know its language) will hear the sounds but will not understand. For example, if a speaker says the sayable «DIO IS-WALKING» by producing an utterance of the English sentence "Dio is walking," which signifies it, then a listener who masters English will grasp the sayable «DIO IS-WALKING». Although people can grasp them in thought, sayables are not private mental items, nor do they depend on thoughts or thinkers for their subsistence. They subsist in agreement with and alongside (*huphistasthai kata*, *paruphistasthai*) some of our representations and our thought.[12]

3. Complete and Incomplete Sayables

There are two main kinds of sayables: complete and incomplete. Incomplete sayables are signified by utterances of linguistic expressions which if uttered separately would not give rise to complete speech acts. The only incomplete sayables mentioned by our sources are predicates, which can be signified by utterances of predicative expressions; e.g., the predicate IS-RUNNING is an incomplete sayable and can be signified by an utterance of the predicative expression "is running."[13] In principle, predicates can hold of (*sumbebêkenai*) or belong to (*huparchein*) items; e.g., the predicate IS-RUNNING holds of an animal just when the animal is running.[14] (I use "just when" to mean "at all and only the times at which.")

It remains unclear whether predicates are the only incomplete sayables. Some commentators hold that cases (*ptôseis*) also are incomplete sayables and are signified by utterances of nouns.[15] Others maintain that at least some cases are corporeal qualities signified by utterances of nouns, and therefore are not sayables (because all sayables are incorporeal).[16]

p. 345 Complete sayables are signified by utterances of linguistic expressions which if uttered separately would (in appropriate circumstances) give rise to complete speech acts. There are many kinds of speech acts, and the Stoics distinguish many corresponding kinds of complete sayables: statables, questions, interrogations, imperatives, oaths, imprecations, hypotheticals, invocations, statable-likes, and arguments.[17] Two kinds of complete sayables are particularly important for Stoic logic: statables and arguments. Much of what I shall say about statables is applicable, mutatis mutandis, to sayables of other kinds.

4. Statables and Truth

According to one Stoic account, "a statable (*axiôma*) is that by saying which we make an assertion" (Diogenes Laertius 7.66); according to another, a statable is "a complete sayable assertible as far as it itself goes" (Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.104 < LS 35C).[18] The two accounts obviously fit well with one another. Statables are normally signified by utterances of assertoric sentences: for instance, the sayable «DIO IS-WALKING», signified by an utterance of the assertoric sentence "Dio is walking," is a statable.

Statables are the only items that can be true or false (in the fundamental sense of "true" and "false"), and they must be either the one or the other but cannot be both.[19] Truth and falsehood are time-relative: whatever is true or false, is such at a time. So: (i) for every α, for every time *t*, if α is true or false at *t* then α is a statable; (ii) for every statable α, for every time *t* at which α subsists, α is false at *t* just if α is not true at *t*.[20] Some statables are true at one time and false at another: the Stoics call them "changing (*metapiptonta*) statables."[21]

The statables with which Stoic logic is concerned are not, then, "dated propositions," such as would be the statable signified by an utterance of, "At 17.00 GMT of May 1, 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev was drinking tea": by contrast, modern logicians are concerned primarily with dated propositions and treat truth as a property that holds or fails to hold atemporally. Note, however, that when it comes to tense logic, modern logicians also resort to truth-at-times, and the Stoics did have a tense logic.[22]

The Stoics consciously engage the issue of specifying the truth-conditions of statables of various kinds. This is a novelty with respect to Aristotle's logic, and it is one of the many concerns that Stoic logicians share with their modern colleagues.

5. Statables Classified

5.1. Simple and Non-Simple Statables

A statable is simple just if it is not the case that among its components it has either one statable occurring more than once or at least two statables; a statable is non-simple just if among its components it has either one statable occurring more than once or at least two statables.[23] For example, «EITHER IT-IS DAY OR IT-IS DAY» and
p. 346 «EITHER IT-IS DAY ↳ OR IT-IS LIGHT» are non-simple statables, while «IT-IS DAY» and «NOT IT-IS DAY» are simple statables.

Non-simple statables not only have further statables among their constituents, but also connectives. Diogenes Laertius reports that "a connective is a part of speech without cases that connects the parts of speech" (7.58). It is not clear how a part of speech can be a constituent of a sayable, which is incorporeal and belongs to the sphere of what is signified. Connectives can have two or more components: the conditional connective "if" does not have components but the conjunctive connective ("both … and …") and the disjunctive connective ("either … or …") do. The Stoics also envisage disjunctive connectives with three (and perhaps more) components (e.g., "either … or … or …").[24] Connectives are employed within non-simple statables in such a way as to be placed (either completely or with their initial component) at the beginning of the non-simple statable: this enables one to detect the type of statable on the basis of how it begins and helps to avoid scope ambiguities (as in the modern Polish logical notation).

Diogenes Laertius attributes to the Stoics the following classification:

> **T1** Among simple statables there are the negative (*apophatikon*), the denegative (*arnêtikon*), the privative (*sterêtikon*), the predicative (*katêgorikon*), the predicatory (*katagoreutikon*), and the indefinite (*aoriston*), among non-simple ones instead the conditional (*sunêmmenon*), the subconditional, the conjunctive (*sumpeplegmenon*), the disjunctive (*diezeugmenon*), the causal, the declarative of the more, and the declarative of the less.
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.69, overlapping with LS 34K)

I begin by discussing simple statables, following the order reported in **T1**, and I then address some non-simple statables: conjunctive, disjunctive, and conditional statables. (These are the only statables that were studied by Chrysippus, and they play a central role in the Stoic theory of inference.)[25]

5.2. Simple Statables

5.2.1. Negative, Denegative, and Privative Statables

Negative statables are the first on a list of three types of simple statables of a negative character. A negative statable consists of the negative particle NOT followed by a statable.[26] A negative statable is true just when the statable which follows its initial NOT is false.[27] For example, the negative statable «NOT IT-IS DAY» is true just when «IT-IS DAY» is false. Note that while some negative statables are simple statables, others are non-simple: «NOT IT-IS DAY» is simple, but «NOT BOTH IT-IS DAY AND IT-IS LIGHT» is non-simple. Negative statables are listed among simple statables merely because some of them are simple.[28] A particular type of negative statable is the hypernegative, which begins with two occurrences of a negative particle (e.g., «NOT NOT IT-IS DAY»). It is true just when the statable following the two occurrences of a negative particle is true.[29]

p. 347 The concept of negative statable is linked to that of contradiction: a statable is a contradictory of another just if either of them consists of the negative particle NOT followed by the other.[30] Note that every statable has at least

one and at most two contradictories (both «IT-IS DAY» and «NOT NOT IT-IS DAY» are contradictories of «NOT IT-IS DAY»).

Some documents suggest that according to the Stoics predicates can also be negated.[31] Thus, a negative predicate consists of the negative particle NOT followed by a predicate; at any time, a negative predicate holds of all and only the items of which the predicate which follows its initial NOT does not hold.[32]

Diogenes Laertius reports:

> **T2** Denegative is that (*sc.* statable) which consists of a denegative particle and a predicate, like "Nobody is walking." Privative is that which consists of a privative particle and a potential statable, like "This one is inhumane."
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.70 < LS 34K)

Diogenes says nothing about the truth-conditions of denegative statables. They may however be plausibly reconstructed on the basis of those of indefinite statables: for every predicate π, the simple denegative statable «NOTHING π» is true just when no predicatory statable «δ π» is true for any direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item.[33] (For predicatory and indefinite statables, see §5.2.2–§5.2.3.)

The truth-conditions of privative statables also have not been handed down. One might wonder at the expression "potential statable" in **T2**. Properly speaking, the immediate components of the privative statable «THIS-ONE IS-INHUMANE» are the direct demonstrative case THIS-ONE and the predicate IS-INHUMANE. However, a statable, «THIS-ONE IS-HUMANE», can be reconstructed from the ultimate components, THIS-ONE and IS-HUMANE, of the privative statable. Why such a roundabout description? Because its author wants to highlight the presence of the privative particle "IN," which is the hallmark of statables of the type under examination.[34]

5.2.2. Predicative and Predicatory Statables

Diogenes Laertius reports:

> **T3** Predicative is that (*sc.* statable) which consists of a direct case and a predicate, like "Dion is walking," whereas predicatory is that which consists of a direct demonstrative case and a predicate, like "This one is walking."
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.70 < LS 34K)

Direct demonstrative cases are probably direct cases of a special sort, so predicatory statables are probably a subclass of predicative statables. Since they are components of statables, which are items signified, cases (and in particular direct demonstrative cases) also are items signified. It remains unclear whether they are sayables.[35]

The expression "direct *demonstrative* case" suggests that predicatory statables are somehow linked with
p. 348 demonstrations (i.e., indications), which accompany utterances ↳ signifying them: an indication is a non-verbal act such as a gesture of the hand pointing to an item in the immediate environment or the movement of the lower lip and the chin toward the chest involved in uttering the first-person pronoun "*egô*" ("I").[36] If the item indicated perishes, the predicatory statable ceases to subsist: the predicatory statable «THIS-ONE IS-DEAD» which can be said while Dio is being indicated is impossible because it is false when Dio is alive whereas it ceases to subsist when Dio is dead; by contrast, the predicative statable «DIO IS-DEAD» is possible because when Dio is dead it does not go out of subsistence and becomes true.[37] Some passages from the ancient grammarians suggest that the indication with which a predicatory statable is linked picks out a lump of matter, so that the

direct demonstrative case that is a component of the predicatory statable is associated with that lump of matter.[38]

A predicative statable that is not predicatory is doubtless signified by an utterance of a predicative sentence with a noun in subject position. The direct case that is its constituent is probably associated with an item or items identified by the quality signified by the noun.[39]

Diogenes Laertius does not record the Stoic truth-conditions of predicative and predicatory statables. Luckily Sextus Empiricus comes to the rescue with the latter:

> **T4** Of simple statables ... definite are those formulated with an indication, for instance "This one is walking" and "This one is seated": for I am indicating some particular man.
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.96 < LS 34H)

> **T5** And this definite statable, "This one is seated" or "This one is walking," they say is true when the predicate, namely "to be seated" or "to be walking," holds of what falls under the indication.
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.100 = LS 34I)

On the assumption that Sextus's simple definite statables include Diogenes's predicatory statables, we can plausibly claim that the Stoic truth-conditions of a predicatory statable are close to what we find in this passage: for every predicate π, for every direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item, the predicatory statable «δ π» is true just when π holds of the item with which δ is associated.

5.2.3. Indefinite Statables

Diogenes Laertius reports:

> **T6** Indefinite is that (*sc.* statable) which consists of one or more indefinite particles, like "Someone is walking," "He is moving."
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.70 < LS 34K)

The statable signified by an utterance of "Someone is walking" may be easily regarded as consisting of an
p. 349 indefinite particle and a predicate. The statable signified by an ↳ utterance of "He is moving" ranks as indefinite probably because we must understand the utterance as immediately following one of "Someone is walking": the utterance of "he" is naturally regarded as "picking up," or being anaphoric on, the earlier utterance of "someone," and thereby as inheriting its indeterminacy. Thus, a statable which can be signified by an utterance of "He is moving" may count as indefinite because it is anaphoric on another indefinite statable, one which can be signified by an utterance of "Someone is walking." By the same token, one component of a statable which can be signified by an utterance of "He is moving" can count as an indefinite particle because it is anaphoric on the indefinite particle which is a component of an indefinite statable which can be signified by an utterance of "Someone is walking."[40]

Among indefinite statables there are not only simple ones (like those mentioned explicitly by Diogenes Laertius), but also non-simple ones (e.g., «IF SOMEONE IS-WALKING HE IS-MOVING » and «IF SOMEONE WAS-BORN-AT-THE-RISING-OF-THE-DOGSTAR HE NOT WILL-DIE-AT-SEA »).[41] This is one of the reasons why Diogenes Laertius speaks of "one or more" indefinite particles. Indefinite statables are listed among simple statables because some of them are simple (in this respect the situation of indefinite statables resembles that of negative statables).

Diogenes Laertius does not explain what the other constituents might be that are involved in indefinite statables: it is surely not the case that an indefinite statable consists *only* of one or more indefinite particles. His silence is probably due to the fact that these other constituents cannot be easily listed: in the case of some particularly simple indefinite statables (e.g., «SOMEONE IS-WALKING») the constituents are merely one indefinite particle and one predicate, but in other cases (e.g., «IF SOMEONE IS-WALKING HE IS-MOVING») the components will be many more and of several different sorts.

Diogenes does not report the truth-conditions of indefinite statables. We are again helped by Sextus:

> **T7** They say that the indefinite, "Someone is walking" or "Someone is seated," is true when the definite, "This one is seated" or "This one is walking," is found to be true: for when no one of the particulars is seated the indefinite "Someone is seated" cannot be true.
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.98 < LS 34H)[42]

So, for every predicate π, the non-anaphoric simple indefinite statable «SOMETHING π» is true just when the predicatory statable «δ π» is true for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. For instance, the non-anaphoric simple indefinite statable «SOMETHING IS-WALKING» is true just when the predicatory statable «δ IS-WALKING» is true for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item.[43]

Our sources are silent with regard to the Stoic truth-conditions of anaphoric simple indefinite statables. We can only rely on our semantic intuitions. Now, if one utters in succession the sentences "Something is noisy" and "It is disturbing," our semantic intuitions tell us that if what one says by uttering "Something is noisy" is true, then ↳ what one says by uttering "It is disturbing" is true just if some item is both noisy and disturbing. It is reasonable to reconstruct the Stoic truth-conditions of anaphoric simple indefinite statables by developing these semantic intuitions in the style of the truth-conditions of non-anaphoric simple indefinite statables, namely by appealing to predicatory statables that contain the predicates of the given simple indefinite statables. The result is: for all predicates ρ and π, if the simple indefinite statable «IT ρ» is anaphoric on the simple non-anaphoric indefinite statable «SOMETHING π», then, for every time *t*, if «SOMETHING π» is true at *t* then «IT ρ» is true at *t* just if the predicatory statable «δ ρ» and the predicatory statable «δ π» are both true at *t* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. These truth-conditions are only partial: if «SOMETHING π» is false at *t*, they do not fix necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth at *t* of «IT ρ» anaphoric on it. This is because we lack linguistic intuitions about this type of case.[44]

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5.3. Non-Simple Statables

5.3.1. Conjunctions

A conjunctive statable (or, briefly, conjunction) begins with an occurrence of the conjunctive connective BOTH, followed by one statable, followed by an occurrence of the conjunctive connective AND, followed by one statable (possibly a second occurrence of the first).[45] For instance, «BOTH IT-IS DAY AND IT-IS LIGHT» and «BOTH IT-IS DAY AND IT-IS DAY» are conjunctions.

A conjunction is true just when both the statables that are its immediate components are true.[46] For example, the conjunction «BOTH IT-IS DAY AND IT-IS LIGHT» is true just when «IT-IS DAY» and «IT-IS LIGHT» are both true.

An interesting case is that of indefinite conjunctions, conjunctions where the first conjunct is an indefinite statable and the second is an indefinite statable anaphoric on the first one.[47] It can be proved that for all

predicates π and ρ, if «IT ρ» is a simple indefinite statable anaphoric on the simple indefinite statable «SOMETHING π», then «BOTH SOMETHING π AND IT ρ» is true just when «BOTH δ π AND δ ρ» is true for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item.[48] This property makes indefinite conjunctions suitable for the role of "existentially quantified" statables.

5.3.2. Disjunctions

A disjunctive statable (or, briefly, disjunction) begins with the disjunctive connective EITHER, followed by one statable, followed by one or more occurrences of statables each of which is preceded by an occurrence of the disjunctive connective OR (the possibility is open that the same statable or statables occur more than once).[49] For instance, «EITHER IT-IS DAY OR IT-IS NIGHT », «EITHER IT-IS DAY OR IT-IS DAY », and «EITHER IT-IS DAY OR IT-IS NIGHT OR IT-IS DAWN OR IT-IS TWILIGHT » are disjunctions.

A disjunction is true just when the following two conditions are both satisfied: first, each of the statables that
p. 351 are its immediate components conflicts with each of the other ↳ statables that are its immediate components; second, the contradictories of the statables that are its immediate components are collectively in conflict.[50] (On conflict, see §5.3.4.) For example, «EITHER IT-IS DAY OR IT-IS NIGHT » is true just when both «IT-IS DAY» conflicts with «IT-IS NIGHT» and «NOT IT-IS DAY» conflicts with «NOT IT-IS NIGHT».

5.3.3. Conditionals

A conditional statable (or, briefly, conditional) begins with the conditional connective IF, followed by one statable, followed by one statable (possibly a second occurrence of the first).[51] For instance, «IF IT-IS DAY IT-IS LIGHT» and «IF IT-IS DAY IT-IS DAY » are conditionals. The component of a conditional which is the statable following the initial IF is its antecedent (*hêgoumenon*), the component which is the statable following the antecedent is its consequent (*lêgon*).[52]

The debate about the truth-conditions of conditionals was so lively that the poet Callimachus could write that "even crows on rooftops are cawing about what things are conditionally linked (*sunêptai*)" (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 1.309). It involved not only members of the Stoic school, but also thinkers like Philo and Diodorus, who were not Stoics. All parties concurred that a conditional "announces" that its consequent "follows" from its antecedent. They disagreed on what "following" is. Sextus Empiricus (*Pyr.* 2.110–12 < LS 35B) reports four accounts of the truth-conditions of conditionals.[53] The first, which he attributes to Philo, is truth-functional: a conditional is true just when it is not the case that both its antecedent is true and its consequent false. Equivalently, a conditional is true when either its antecedent and its consequent are both true, or they are both false, or its antecedent is false and its consequent true, whereas it is false when its antecedent is true and its consequent false.[54] On the second account, which Sextus ascribes to Diodorus, a conditional is true at a time *t* just if neither at *t* nor at any time before *t* is it possible for its antecedent to be true and its consequent false. Since, according to Diodorus, something is possible at a time just if it is the case either then or after, it follows that for Diodorus a conditional is true at a time *t* just if it is never the case that its antecedent is true and its consequent false.[55] This implies that if a conditional is ever true, then it is true at all times when it subsists. On the third account, which Sextus attributes to "those who introduce connection" (he names neither individual supporters nor schools), a conditional is true just when the contradictory of its consequent conflicts with its antecedent. According to the fourth and final account, which Sextus ascribes to "those who judge by expressivity (*emphasis*)" (again he names neither individual supporters nor schools), a conditional is true just when its consequent is potentially contained in its antecedent.

Sextus lists these four accounts in order of increasing strength: if a conditional is ever true according to a later account, it is also true then according to every earlier account, but some conditional true at a certain time according to an earlier account is false then according to every later one. Sextus offers examples to prove this

last point. Suppose that at time *t* during today's daytime I am talking and that at a later time still within today's daytime I am silent: then at *t* the conditional «IF IT-IS DAY I AM-TALKING » is true according to the first account,
p. 352 but false according to the others. Suppose that simple ↳ elements of entities exist always: then, at any time *t*, the conditional «IF NOT SIMPLE-ELEMENTS-OF-ENTITIES EXIST SIMPLE-ELEMENTS-OF-ENTITIES EXIST» is true according to the second account (because it is never the case that its antecedent is true and its consequent false) but is false according to the later accounts (e.g., at *t* the contradictory of its consequent does not conflict with its antecedent). Finally, at any time *t*, the conditional «IF IT-IS DAY IT-IS DAY » is true according to the third account (because at *t* the contradictory of its consequent conflicts with its antecedent), but false according to the fourth (because, Sextus says, "it is impossible that anything be contained in itself").

Diogenes Laertius ascribes what is in fact Sextus's third account to the Stoics.[56] Most scholars agree in attributing it to Chrysippus.[57] It is likely that Chrysippus developed this account in response to the shortcomings of those put forward by Philo and Diodorus.

5.3.4. Conflict

The truth-conditions of disjunctions and Chrysippus's truth-conditions of conditionals appeal to conflict (*machê*). What is it for one statable to conflict with another? Our evidence is tantalizingly scant.

Galen distinguishes between complete and incomplete conflict (he also uses the simple noun "conflict" with no qualification to indicate incomplete conflict): a statable α conflicts (incompletely) with a statable β at a time *t* just if it is impossible that α and β be both true at *t*; a statable α conflicts completely with a statable β at *t* just if α conflicts (incompletely) with β at *t* and moreover it is impossible that α and β be both false at *t*.[58] Several commentators attribute this modal account of conflict to the Stoics.[59]

One problem with the modal account of conflict is that if it is correct, then Chrysippus's truth-conditions of conditionals require that for every time *t*, if it is impossible that the statable α be true at *t* then every conditional with α as antecedent is true at *t*, even in cases where the consequent is completely unconnected with α. This seems to clash with the description of Chrysippus's truth-conditions as introducing connection. Another problem with the modal account of conflict is that a passage from Sextus Empiricus (*Pyr.* 2.189) suggests that a conditional cannot be true when its antecedent conflicts with its consequent: but, if the modal account of conflict is correct, then for every time *t*, if it is impossible that the statable α be true at *t* then every conditional with α as antecedent is true at *t* while having its antecedent conflicting at *t* with its consequent.[60] These problems lead some commentators to reject the modal account of conflict and look for an alternative. Another document that provides us with some information about conflict is a passage from Alexander of Aphrodisias's *Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*:

> **T8** The following also are useful, for instance … that a consequence is that which necessarily is the case because something else is the case, whereas conflicting is that which necessarily is not the case (*sc.* because something else is the case).
>
> (Alexander of Aphrodisias *in Top.* 93, 6–10)

The definition of conflict reported by Alexander introduces an idea of dependency: for a statable α to conflict
p. 353 with a statable β at a time *t* is for it to be the case that the truth of α ↳ at *t* excludes, or in some way "pushes out," the truth of β at *t*.[61] Note that if α is impossible at *t*, it does not thereby follow that the truth of α at *t* excludes the truth of β at *t*: in such a situation, it may well be the case that the truth of β at *t* is not excluded by the truth of α at *t*, but is ruled out in its own right (for an analogy, think of the important difference between quitting a job and being fired).

My impression is that the evidence does not enable us to reach any reliable conclusion about the nature of conflict: I find it hard to refrain from accepting Galen's witness, but the problems mentioned earlier tell against it. In whatever way we settle this issue, it is worth noting that the Stoics maintain that an argument is valid just if the contradictory of its consequent conflicts with the conjunction of its premisses.[62] This suggests that the relation of conflict should be of a logical nature (albeit here "logical" may have to be construed broadly, so that inferences of an analytic character also count as "logical").[63]

5.3.5. Indefinite Conditionals

Some documents indicate that indefinite conditionals—namely statables which consist of the conditional connective IF, followed by a simple indefinite statable, followed by another simple indefinite statable anaphoric on the preceding one—are particularly important for the Stoics.[64] A passage in Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 11.3–14 > LS 30I) makes it plausible to attribute to them the following view: for all predicates π and ρ, the indefinite conditional «IF SOMETHING π IT ρ» (with «IT ρ» being a simple indefinite statable anaphoric on «SOMETHING π») is true just when every instance of it is true—i.e., just when the conditional «IF δ π δ ρ» is true for every direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. These truth-conditions can be derived from those of conditionals and of simple indefinite statables and their negations.[65] They make indefinite conditionals suitable for the role of "universally quantified" statables: in fact, in the passage just mentioned, Sextus reports that "technical writers" use the noun "universal" ("*katholikon*") to refer to indefinite conditionals.

5.3.6. Signs

The concept of sign (*sêmeion*) played a central role in epistemological debates of Hellenistic philosophy. Sextus Empiricus credits the Stoics with a distinction between "commemorative" (*hupomnêstikon*) and "indicative" (*endeiktikon*) signs. A commemorative sign was earlier evident in conjunction with what it signals and, when it is evident on an occasion when what it signals happens not to be evident, leads the perceiver to remember what it signals (the example most frequently used is that of smoke being a sign of a fire). An indicative sign performs its signifying function not thanks to its having been earlier evident in conjunction with what it signals, but in virtue of "its proper nature and constitution"; an example is that of bodily motions being a sign of the soul. Signs are particularly important for the Stoics, for several reasons: given their empiricist outlook, the problem of reaching behind what is given in perception was particularly acute for the Stoics, a point pressed by their skeptical opponents; and their view that the universe is a single living being permeated by the divine led them to assume that many natural phenomena are signs.

p. 354 According to Sextus, the Stoics incorporate their theory of signs in their logic, in particular in their theory of conditionals. Specifically, they define an indicative sign as a true conditional's antecedent that is true and revelatory (*ekkaluptikon*) of its consequent. In offering this definition, they adopt Philo's truth-functional account of the truth-conditions of the conditional: the uninteresting cases that would be allowed by these truth-conditions are ruled out by the requirement that the antecedent be revelatory of the consequent. Being the antecedent of a conditional, an indicative sign is a statable, and therefore an incorporeal sayable.[66]

6. Tense

Some debates among Hellenistic logicians show that tense was important for them. According to the Stoics, both predicates and statables are tensed. Past-tense and future-tense predicates and statables are "inflected from" present-tense predicates and statables.[67]

Truth-conditions that concern time and appeal to present-tense statables seem to have been adopted. They amount to something like the following (for every present-tense statable α and every time *t*):

> The future-tense inflection of α is true at *t* just if α is true at some time after *t*
>
> The past-tense inflection of α is true at *t* just if α is true at some time before *t*[68]

The Stoics also reflected on verbal aspect. They examined the use of verbs to express a motion's being in progress (cf. "... is dying") and their use to indicate a motion's having come to completion (cf. "... has died"). Regrettably, we only have hints of their views in this area.[69]

7. Modality

The Stoics take statables to be bearers not only of truth and falsehood, but also of modal properties. They treat modal concepts not as operators that may enter into statables as components, but as properties of statables; for instance, they do not study the truth-conditions of a statable signified by an utterance of "Necessarily there will be a famine," but the necessity-conditions of the statable signified by an utterance of "There will be a famine." Thus, the Stoic treatment of modality is different from that of tense. Moreover, it is bound to ignore issues about iterated modalities (e.g., "It is possible that it is necessary that ...").

As with truth and falsehood, the modal properties also are time-relative: at any given time, every statable is
p. 355 either possible or impossible, and either necessary or ↳ non-necessary. As in the case of conditionals, there are reasons for thinking that Chrysippus developed his modal theory in response to those of Philo and Diodorus.[70]

Boethius (*in Int. sec. ed.* 234, 10–22) credits Philo with the view that what matters for a statable's enjoying a certain modal property at a given time is the statable's internal nature, or content. Thus (for every statable α and every time *t*):

> α is possible at *t* just if α's nature allows α to be true at some time or other
>
> α is impossible at *t* just if α's nature prevents α from being true at any time
>
> α is necessary at *t* just if α's nature prevents α from being false at any time
>
> α is non-necessary at *t* just if α's nature allows α to be false at some time or other

Any statable that enjoys a modal property at a particular time enjoys it always. Some statable is possible at a given time even though it is always false.[71]

Our sources enable us to credit Diodorus with the view that what matters for a statable's enjoying a certain modal property at a given time is the truth-value-career of that statable from that time onwards.[72] Specifically (for every statable α and every time *t*):

> α is possible at *t* just if α is true either at *t* or at some time after *t*
>
> α is impossible at *t* just if α is false both at *t* and at every time after *t*
>
> α is necessary at *t* just if α is true both at *t* and at every time after *t*
>
> α is non-necessary at *t* just if α is false either at *t* or at some time after *t*

Contrary to what happens in the case of Philo, for Diodorus a statable can acquire or lose a modal property: a statable can cease being possible (or, respectively, non-necessary) and become impossible (or, respectively, necessary; the reverse transition cannot occur). Every past-tense statable is necessary just when it is true (this

vindicates the intuition that the past is unchangeable), and every future-tense statable is impossible just when it is false.

Diodorus's characterization of modal properties has a deterministic flavor: not because it requires that any statable that is true now should be necessary now (it does not require this because a statable may well be true now and false later, and therefore not necessary now), but because it implies that any statable that is true neither now nor later is impossible now. Chrysippus disliked this implication and proposed an alternative account of modal properties that combines Philo's conditions with a role for external circumstances.[73] The main witness is a corrupt passage in Diogenes Laertius:

> **T9** Moreover, some (*sc.* statables) are possible, others impossible, and some necessary, others non-necessary. Possible is that which is receptive of being true with external things not opposing its being true (e.g., "Diocles is alive"). Impossible is that which is not receptive of being true ‹or is receptive of it but external things oppose its being true› (e.g., "The earth flies.")[74] Necessary is that which while
> p. 356 being true is not receptive of being false or is receptive of it but external ↳ things oppose its being false, e.g. "Virtue is beneficial." Non-necessary is that which even ‹if› true can be false with none of the external things opposing ‹its being false›, e.g. "Dio is walking."
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.75 = LS 38D)[75]

Chrysippus's characterization of modal properties, unlike Diodorus's, does not imply that any statable that is true neither now nor later is impossible now: for, there may well be a statable that is true neither now nor later, is receptive of being true, and is such that external circumstances do not oppose its being true («THIS GEM IS-BROKEN», said while a gem is being indicated that neither is nor will be broken, is probably one such statable).

The characterization of modal properties offered in passage **T9** leaves several details unspecified. What follows is one way of sharpening it.[76] For every statable α and every time *t*:

> α is possible at *t* just if both α's nature allows α to be true at some time or other and either at *t* or at some later time external circumstances do not prevent α from being true then
>
> α is impossible at *t* just if either α's nature prevents α from being true at any time or both at *t* and at all later times external circumstances prevent α from being true then
>
> α is necessary at *t* just if either α's nature prevents α from being false at any time or both at *t* and at all later times external circumstances prevent α from being false then
>
> α is non-necessary at *t* just if both α's nature allows α to be false at some time or other and either at *t* or at some later time external circumstances do not prevent α from being false then

8. Arguments

8.1. Arguments and Modes

The Stoics define an argument (*logos*) as "a complex of premisses and conclusion" (Diogenes Laertius 7.45). The argument's premisses and conclusion are usually statables, but the argument itself is not a statable. (Some Stoics appear also to have examined arguments among whose components there are hypotheticals or imperatives.) A famous Stoic example of an argument is «IF IT-IS DAY IT-IS LIGHT, IT-IS DAY, THEREFORE IT-IS LIGHT». Here the statables «IF IT-IS DAY IT-IS LIGHT» and «IT-IS DAY» are the premisses, whereas «IT-IS LIGHT» is the conclusion. The plural expression "premisses" in the Stoic definition must be taken literally: Chrysippus insisted that arguments have at least two premisses (on this point he agreed with Aristotle's view about syllogisms but was criticized by Antipater, a later Stoic who allowed arguments with a single premiss).[77]

p. 357 Arguments are distinguished from modes (*tropoi*), which are the figures or structures according to which arguments are constructed.[78] A mode of an argument is formulated with numerals in place of the sentences which would appear in the formulation of the argument: "If the first the second, the first, therefore the second" is a mode. Alongside arguments and modes there are also argument-modes (*logotropoi*)—e.g., "If Plato is alive, Plato breathes, the first, therefore the second." Their purpose is to avoid pointless repetitions of lengthy formulations of a premiss or of the conclusion.[79] The numerals ("the first," "the second," etc.) seem to play different roles in modes and in argument-modes: in the former they function as schematic letters, in the latter as names or abbreviations of specific sentences.[80]

8.2. Arguments Classified

Diogenes Laertius reports:

> **T10** Of arguments, some are invalid, others valid. Invalid are those where the contradictory of the conclusion does not conflict with the conjunction of the premisses, namely those like "If it is day it is light, but it is day, therefore Dio is walking." Of valid arguments, some are called "valid" homonymously to their genus, while the others are syllogistic. Syllogistic are those which either are indemonstrable or are reduced to the indemonstrables by means of one or more of the posits.
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.77–8 < LS 36A)

The definition of invalid argument presupposes that an argument is valid (*perantikos*, *sunaktikos*) just if the contradictory of its conclusion conflicts with the conjunction of its premisses. In view of the truth-conditions of conditionals recorded by Diogenes Laertius (see §5.3.3), it follows that an argument is valid just if the "corresponding conditional"—i.e., the conditional where the antecedent is the conjunction of the argument's premisses and the consequent is its conclusion—is true.[81] Since conflict and truth are time-relative, it looks as if the validity of arguments should also be time-relative—but our sources never mention this trait.

The Stoics also apply "true," "false," and modal expressions to arguments: an argument is true just if it is valid and its premisses are true, it is false otherwise.[82] The use of "true" in application to arguments is derivative with respect to its use in application to statables. It corresponds to "sound" as it is employed in modern philosophical logic. The definitions of necessary, non-necessary, possible, and impossible arguments have not been handed down.

According to one Stoic characterization, a demonstration (*apodeixis*) is an argument which from premisses that are apprehended (either by the general public or by those to whom the demonstration is addressed) establishes a conclusion that used not to be apprehended but has become apprehended.[83]

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8.3. Formal Validity

Stoic logicians reflected on the concept of formal validity, namely on how an argument's validity depends on its logical structure (the way in which the simplest statables are composed within the argument by means of negative particles and connectives and the pattern with which statables return in this compound). The key concept in this area is that of a valid mode: a mode is valid only if no argument in it ever has true premisses and a false conclusion. For instance, the mode "If the first the second, not the first, therefore not the second" is not valid: for, to be sure, some arguments in it never have true premisses and a false conclusion—e.g., «IF THE-THREE ARE-FOUR THE-SIX ARE-EIGHT, NOT THE-THREE ARE-FOUR, THEREFORE NOT THE-SIX ARE-EIGHT » never has a false conclusion and therefore never has true premisses and a false conclusion. But other arguments in it do sometimes have true premisses and a false conclusion—e.g., «IF IT-IS DAY IT-IS LIGHT, NOT IT-IS DAY, THEREFORE NOT IT-IS LIGHT» has true premisses and a false conclusion at night when artificial light is on.[84]

According to a criterion of validity that may be plausibly attributed to the Stoics, an argument is invalid if it is asked in an invalid mode.[85] Chrysippus was however aware that the same argument can be in more than one mode.[86] Since every argument is in at least one invalid mode (e.g., "The first, the second, therefore the third"), we may tentatively infer that the Stoic position was that an argument is invalid if no mode of it is valid.

We are not in a position to credit the Stoics with the converses of the claims just considered: there is no evidence for attributing to them the view that a mode is valid if no argument in it ever has true premisses and a false conclusion, nor for attributing to them the view that an argument is invalid only if no mode of it is valid (or, equivalently, that an argument is valid if at least one mode of it is valid). In this respect the Stoic conception of validity could well be weaker than the one that is most widespread in modern philosophical logic and derives from Tarski.

8.3.1. Syllogisms

Passage **T10** reports that valid arguments divide into syllogisms and arguments that "are called 'valid' homonymously to their genus." The latter comprise sub-syllogistic arguments, namely arguments obtained from syllogisms by replacing one or more of the statables involved with equivalent ones, and "non-methodically valid arguments," about which we know regrettably little (they seem to have been arguments that can be reduced to syllogisms by adding as a premiss a statable that enjoys a special status).[87] Passage **T10** also indicates that syllogisms comprise indemonstrables and arguments that are reduced to indemonstrables by means of one or more of the posits (*themata*: see §8.3.3). The reduction of non-indemonstrable syllogisms to the indemonstrables amounts to some sort of demonstration. What is demonstrated is validity. The indemonstrables are arguments whose validity need not be demonstrated because it is obvious in its own right.[88] (The Stoic indemonstrables therefore correspond to Aristotle's "perfect syllogisms.")[89]

p. 359 Syllogisms are arguments, not argument-forms or argument-schemata. A special class of syllogisms is that where the conclusion is identical with one of the premisses: they were called "duplicated" or "indifferently concluding."[90] In allowing syllogisms of this sort, the Stoics parted company with Aristotle, who required that a syllogism's conclusion be different from its premisses.[91]

8.3.2. Five Kinds of Indemonstrables

Chrysippus distinguished five kinds of indemonstrables. Indemonstrables of the first kind are arguments where one premiss is a conditional, the other premiss is the conditional's antecedent, and the conclusion is its consequent (e.g., «IF IT-IS DAY IT-IS LIGHT, IT-IS DAY, THEREFORE IT-IS LIGHT »). Indemonstrables of the second kind are arguments where one premiss is a conditional, the other premiss is a contradictory of the conditional's consequent, and the conclusion is a contradictory of its antecedent (e.g., «IF IT-IS DAY IT-IS LIGHT, NOT IT-IS LIGHT, THEREFORE NOT IT-IS DAY»).[92] Indemonstrables of the third kind are arguments where one premiss is a negation of a conjunction, the other premiss is a conjunct of the conjunction, and the conclusion is a contradictory of the other conjunct (e.g., «NOT BOTH IT-IS DAY AND IT-IS NIGHT, IT-IS DAY, THEREFORE NOT IT-IS NIGHT»). Indemonstrables of the fourth kind include arguments where one premiss is a disjunction, the other premiss is one of its disjuncts, and the conclusion is a contradictory of the other disjunct (e.g., «EITHER IT-IS DAY OR IT-IS NIGHT, IT-IS DAY, THEREFORE NOT IT-IS NIGHT »). Finally, indemonstrables of the fifth kind include arguments where one premiss is a disjunction, the other premiss is a contradictory of one disjunct, and the conclusion is the other disjunct (e.g., «EITHER IT-IS DAY OR IT-IS NIGHT, NOT IT-IS DAY, THEREFORE IT-IS NIGHT»).[93] Indemonstrables of the fifth kind also include arguments where the disjunction has more than two disjuncts and the number of the additional premisses is correspondingly augmented.[94] Something analogous probably holds for indemonstrables of the fourth kind.

In every indemonstrable, one premiss contains both the other premisses (or contradictories of them) and the conclusion (or a contradictory of it) as components. The Stoics called it "deviator" ("*tropikon*") because it produces a deviation (*tropos*) from one or more statables to a further statable (according to another etymology, the name "*tropikon*" alludes to the fact that the syllogism is based on this premiss as a ship on its keel, *tropis*) or "leader" ("*hêgemonikon*"). For the other premisses, they used "co-assumption" ("*proslêpsis*").[95] There is no indication that the order of the premisses makes any difference.

8.3.3. The Posits

The posits are rules for the reduction of the other syllogisms to the indemonstrables (the Stoics also used "analysis" and "to analyze" for this reduction).[96] The reduction proceeds backward: one begins by considering the non-indemonstrable syllogism to be reduced, one then identifies one or more arguments to which it can be
p. 360 reduced by means of a posit, and one continues reducing every argument thus obtained until one reaches ↳ indemonstrables. The evidence suggests that Chrysippus recognized four posits, but only the first and the third are recorded.

The first posit is a rule of contraposition for arguments. Apuleius reports it as follows:

> **T11** If from two things a third one is inferred, then from one of them together with the opposite of the conclusion the opposite of the other may be inferred.
>
> (Apuleius *Int.* 191, 8–10 Thomas < LS 37I)

This rule applies only to arguments with exactly two premisses, but such a restriction is unlikely. It is more probable that the first posit also covered arguments with more than two premisses.[97] It may therefore be plausibly represented as embracing four rules:[98]

$$\frac{\text{«}\Gamma,\alpha\Rightarrow\beta\text{»}}{\text{«}\Gamma,\text{NOT }\beta\Rightarrow\text{NOT }\alpha\text{»}}\,\text{P1}\prime \qquad \frac{\text{«}\Gamma,\alpha\Rightarrow\text{NOT }\beta\text{»}}{\text{«}\Gamma,\beta\Rightarrow\text{NOT }\alpha\text{»}}\,\text{P1}\prime\prime$$

$$\frac{\text{«}\Gamma,\text{NOT }\alpha\Rightarrow\beta\text{»}}{\text{«}\Gamma,\text{NOT }\beta\Rightarrow\alpha\text{»}}\,\text{P1}\prime\prime\prime \qquad \frac{\text{«}\Gamma,\text{NOT }\alpha\Rightarrow\text{NOT }\beta\text{»}}{\text{«}\Gamma,\beta\Rightarrow\alpha\text{»}}\,\text{P1}\prime\prime\prime\prime$$

To save typographical space, here and in similar situations I use "⇒" instead of "therefore" and I adopt lower-case Greek letters as names of arbitrarily chosen statables (this is not far from Stoic practice because "α," "β," etc. are also Greek numerals, as in the Stoic modes). Since the Stoics expressly recognized the possibility that the same statable could occur more than once in the same sayable (see §5.1 and §8.3.1), groups of statables are best treated as multisets, where multisets are sets in which different occurrences of the same thing make a difference. Thus, I use capital Greek letters as names of arbitrarily chosen non-empty finite multisets of statables and the comma for the union of multisets (with obvious adjustments when singletons are needed). Here is an example of an application of the first posit:

$$\dfrac{\dfrac{}{\text{«EITHER } \alpha \text{ OR } \beta,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \text{NOT } \beta\text{»}}}{\text{«EITHER } \alpha \text{ OR } \beta,\ \beta \Rightarrow \text{NOT } \alpha\text{»}}$$

The top line is a fourth indemonstrable, as is the bottom one, and the inferential step is warranted by P1″. Similar applications of the first posit show that a single form of each indemonstrable is sufficient to obtain all the others.[99]

As for the remaining three posits, the main evidence comes from Galen:

> **T12** As for how syllogisms with two deviators are analyzed, and how the indifferently concluding ones and others of the same sort, which use the first and the second posit, ‹are analyzed›, you can now come across many who have exercised themselves in a precise way, as doubtless ‹you can come across› others ‹who have exercised themselves in a precise way› with all the syllogisms which they analyze by means of the third or fourth posit.
>
> (Galen *Plac. Hippocr. Pl.* 2.3.18 [5.224, 3–9 Kühn] < LS 36H)[100]

p. 361 Galen distinguishes three groups of syllogisms with which some people "have exercised themselves in a precise way" (one imagines students who train themselves in logic by rigorously applying the posits): (1) those with two deviators, (2) those that are analyzed by the first and the second posit and include the indifferently concluding arguments and unspecified other similar arguments, and (3) those that are analyzed by the third and the fourth posit.[101]

When he says that the first posit in tandem with the second enables one to analyze the indifferently concluding arguments, Galen can hardly mean that *some* indifferently concluding arguments can be analyzed in this way: for some indifferently concluding arguments can be analyzed without appealing to any posit (e.g., «IF α, α α ⇒ α» is a first indemonstrable and «EITHER α OR NOT α, α ⇒ α» is both a fourth and a fifth indemonstrable). Galen can only mean that *all* indifferently concluding arguments can be analyzed by using the first posit in tandem with the second. This, in turn, may be plausibly taken to amount to the claim that the first posit in tandem with the second enables one to analyze all arguments «α, β ⇒ α». One way of achieving this outcome is to adopt as a second posit a rule of conjunction-elimination, more or less as follows: "If a conjunction is inferred, then either of its conjuncts may be inferred from the same premisses." Thus:

$$\dfrac{\text{«}\Gamma \Rightarrow \text{BOTH } \alpha \text{ AND } \beta\text{»}}{\text{«}\Gamma \Rightarrow \alpha\text{»}}\ \text{P2}\prime \qquad \dfrac{\text{«}\Gamma \Rightarrow \text{BOTH } \alpha \text{ AND } \beta\text{»}}{\text{«}\Gamma \Rightarrow \beta\text{»}}\ \text{P2}\prime\prime$$

Here Γ contains at least two elements. The reduction of an arbitrary indifferently concluding argument is as follows:

$$\dfrac{\dfrac{\dfrac{}{\text{«NOT BOTH } \alpha \text{ AND } \beta,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \text{NOT } \beta\text{»}}}{\text{«}\alpha,\ \beta \Rightarrow \text{BOTH } \alpha \text{ AND } \beta\text{»}}}{\text{«}\alpha,\ \beta \Rightarrow \alpha\text{»}}$$

The top line is a third indemonstrable while the successive inferential steps are warranted by P1‴ and P2′. By taking «NOT β» instead of β and applying P1‴, one obtains *ex contradictione quodlibet*: «α, NOT α ⇒ β».[102]

Simplicius reports the third posit as follows:

> **T13** If from two (*sc.* statables) a third one is inferred, and from the one inferred together with another one from outside something is inferred, then from the first two (*sc.* statables) and the one added from outside the same thing will be inferred.
>
> (Simplicius *in Cael.* 237, 2–4)[103]

It is however unlikely that the rule reported by Simplicius should be the original Stoic third posit because its application only to arguments with exactly two premisses is exceedingly narrow. Some commentators take the
p. 362 qualification "from outside" ("*exôthen*") ↳ to indicate that the additional premiss of the second argument is different from the premisses of the first one.[104] This is unlikely because, as I pointed out earlier, the Stoics were not worried by multiple occurrences of the same statable within the same sayable. Moreover, "from outside" does not mean "different": it indicates an external provenance, and it could have been chosen precisely to avoid the implication that the additional premiss of the second argument is different from the premisses of the first one. Accordingly, I take the third posit to amount to the following:

$$\frac{\text{«}\Gamma \Rightarrow \alpha\text{»} \quad \text{«}\alpha,\ \Delta \Rightarrow \beta\text{»}}{\text{«}\Gamma,\ \Delta \Rightarrow \beta\text{»}}\,\mathrm{P3}$$

Here Γ contains at least two elements. An application of this rule can be seen in the following reduction:

$$\frac{\overline{\text{«IF BOTH } \alpha \text{ AND } \beta\ \gamma,\ \text{NOT } \gamma \Rightarrow \text{NOT BOTH } \alpha \text{ AND } \beta\text{»}} \qquad \overline{\text{«NOT BOTH } \alpha \text{ AND } \beta,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \text{ NOT } \beta\text{»}}}{\text{«IF BOTH } \alpha \text{ AND } \beta\ \gamma,\ \text{NOT } \gamma,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \text{NOT } \beta\text{»}}$$

The arguments in the top line are a second and a third indemonstrable.[105]

Multiple applications of the third posit allow one to reduce indifferently concluding arguments with more than two premisses:

$$\frac{\dfrac{\dfrac{\vdots}{\text{«}\alpha_1,\ \alpha_2 \Rightarrow \alpha_1\text{»}} \quad \dfrac{\vdots}{\text{«}\alpha_1,\ \alpha_3 \Rightarrow \alpha_1\text{»}}}{\text{«}\alpha_1,\ \alpha_2,\ \alpha_3 \Rightarrow \alpha_1\text{»}} \qquad \dfrac{\vdots}{\text{«}\alpha_1,\ \alpha_4 \Rightarrow \alpha_1\text{»}}}{\text{«}\alpha_1,\ \alpha_2,\ \alpha_3,\ \alpha_4 \Rightarrow \alpha_1\text{»}} \quad \ldots$$

Thus, every case of «α, Γ ⇒ α» is a syllogism. One more application of P3 enables one to obtain a "thinning rule":

$$\frac{\dfrac{\vdots}{\text{«}\Gamma \Rightarrow \beta\text{»}} \qquad \dfrac{\vdots}{\text{«}\beta,\ \Delta \Rightarrow\ \beta\text{»}}}{\text{«}\Gamma,\ \Delta \Rightarrow\ \beta\text{»}}$$

Here Γ contains at least two elements.[106]

Applications of the third posit often bring it about that the same statable occurs more than once among the premisses. This calls for a contraction rule, which enables one to cancel one of the many occurrences of the same statable provided that this leaves the argument with at least two premisses. I conjecture that this was the import of the fourth posit:

$$\frac{\text{«}\Gamma,\ \alpha,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \beta\text{»}}{\text{«}\Gamma,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \beta\text{»}}\,\mathrm{P4}$$

p. 363 As I pointed out earlier, in passage **T12** Galen distinguishes three groups of Stoic syllogisms: (1) those with two deviators, (2) those analyzed by the first and the second posit, and (3) those analyzed by the third and the fourth posit. One therefore expects that the syllogisms with two deviators should be analyzed by using both some of the posits involved in the second group (i.e., the first or the second) and some of the posits involved in the third group (i.e., the third or the fourth). A passage from Origen enables us to identify the syllogisms with two deviators with arguments of the form «IF α β, IF α NOT β ⇒ NOT α». Arguments of this sort are indeed analyzed by the first, third, and fourth posit:

$$\dfrac{\dfrac{\dfrac{\overline{\text{«IF } \alpha \text{ NOT } \beta,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \text{NOT } \beta\text{»}} \quad \overline{\text{«IF } \alpha\ \beta,\ \text{NOT } \beta \Rightarrow \text{NOT } \alpha\text{»}}}{\text{«IF } \alpha\ \beta,\ \text{IF } \alpha \text{ NOT } \beta,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \text{NOT } \alpha\text{»}}}{\text{«IF } \alpha \text{ NOT } \beta,\ \alpha,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \text{NOT IF } \alpha\ \beta\text{»}}}{\text{«IF } \alpha \text{ NOT } \beta,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \text{NOT IF } \alpha\ \beta\text{»}}}{\text{«IF } \alpha\ \beta,\ \text{IF } \alpha \text{ NOT } \beta \Rightarrow \text{NOT } \alpha\text{»}}$$

The arguments in the top line are a first indemonstrable and a second indemonstrable while the inferential steps are warranted by P3, P1″, P4, and P1″.[107]

An example of a reduction only involving the third and the fourth posit is the following:

$$\dfrac{\dfrac{\overline{\text{«IF } \alpha \text{ IF } \alpha\ \beta,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \text{IF } \alpha\ \beta\text{»}} \quad \overline{\text{«IF } \alpha\ \beta,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \beta\text{»}}}{\text{«IF } \alpha \text{ IF } \alpha\ \beta,\ \alpha,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \beta\text{»}}}{\text{«IF } \alpha \text{ IF } \alpha\ \beta,\ \alpha \Rightarrow \beta\text{»}}$$

The arguments in the top line are first indemonstrables, and the inferential steps are warranted by P3 and P4.[108]

The first two of the four posits that I indicated are “operational” rules in that they concern the behavior of specific logical operators (in particular, of negation and conjunction); the last two are “structural” rules in that they do not focus on specific logical operators.[109] A system with these four posits can be proved to be complete as far as negation and conjunction are concerned. More precisely: it can be proved that if an argument has two or more (but finitely many) premisses, involves only negations or conjunctions, and is classically valid (i.e., no assignment of truth values to the simplest statables in it enables someone applying the classical rules for negations and conjunctions to make its premisses true and its conclusion false), then that argument can be reduced.[110]

9. Sophisms

The Stoics studied several sophisms, arguments with a paradoxical conclusion which however appear to be
p. 364 valid and to have true premisses: the Liar (which exposes ↳ difficulties connected with the concepts of truth and falsehood), the Veiled (about referentially opaque contexts), the Horned (concerning presuppositions), the Nobody (an attack on certain conceptions of universals), the Mower (about determinism), and the Heap (concerning vagueness). For instance, the Heap went roughly as follows: “A single grain is not a heap. The addition of a grain cannot transform what is not a heap into a heap. Therefore, no amount of grains is a heap.”

Many Stoic sophisms are aimed at exposing genuine difficulties afflicting the Stoic philosophical system and those of other schools. They are, in a sense, “constructive”: they prompt us to find solutions to philosophical problems. In this respect, as in many others, the attitude of Stoic logicians is close to that of their modern colleagues.[111]

Notes

1. Łukasiewicz 1934; Mates 1953/61.

2. The most comprehensive collection of the fragments and testimonia of Stoic logic is Hülser 1987–88.

3. On the extent of Chrysippus's contributions to Stoic logic, see Castagnoli, this volume, §3.

4. Diogenes Laertius 7.41 (< LS 31A). Some Stoics divide the logical part differently.

5. Diogenes Laertius 7.62; 43 (< LS 31A); Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.214; Seneca *Ep.* 89, 17. What we call "logic" corresponds more closely to what the Stoics call "dialectic" than to what they call "the logical part of philosophy."

6. Diogenes Laertius 7.44 (< LS 31A).

7. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.11–13 > LS 33B. At *Math.* 8.137 Sextus speaks as if there were supporters of the view that the bearers of truth or falsehood are mental events. The distinction between what signifies and what is signified matches the division of dialectic (cf. §1). It remains unclear whether all that is signified (by utterances) is incorporeal and is a sayable: more on this in §3.

8. Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 8.80) attributes this definition of saying to the Stoics. Bobzien 2003: 86 points out some unpalatable consequences of it.

9. I take any utterance of a simple linguistic expression to signify an item which I denote by a name written in small caps (and, if appropriate, with hyphens): for instance, an utterance of "runs" signifies the predicate RUNS, and an utterance of "is walking" signifies the predicate IS-WALKING. I take any utterance of any complex linguistic expression to signify the concatenation of the items signified by the utterances of its component simple linguistic expressions: for instance, an utterance of "Dio is walking" signifies DIO + IS-WALKING (namely the concatenation of DIO with IS-WALKING), and an utterance of "Not Dio is walking" signifies NOT + (DIO + IS-WALKING) (namely the concatenation of NOT with the concatenation of DIO with IS-WALKING). I use a sequence of occurrences of names enclosed in chevron quotes ("«" and "»") as an abbreviation of the expression obtained by inserting occurrences of the concatenation symbol between those occurrences of names: for instance, "«NOT DIO IS-WALKING»" abbreviates "NOT + (DIO + IS-WALKING)."

10. Alexander of Aphrodisias *in Top.* 301, 19–25 (= LS 27B); Plutarch *Comm. not.* 30, 1073E.

11. Galen *Meth. med.* 10.155, 1–8 Kühn (= LS 27G); Plutarch *Comm. not.* 30, 1074D; *Adv. Col.* 15, 1116B–C; Diogenes Laertius 7.43 (< LS 31A); 63 (= LS 33F); Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.12 (< LS 33B); 70 (= LS 33C); 336; 10.218 (= LS 27D); 237; 1.17 (= LS 27C);
p. 365 20; *Pyr.* 2.81 (< LS 33P); ↳ Syrianus *in Metaph.* 105, 25; Simplicius *in Cat.* 361, 10–11; 397, 10–11. Unlike the English "something," the Greek indefinite pronoun has not only a singular form ("*ti*"), but also a dual ("*tine*") and a plural ("*tina*"). Translators and commentators sometimes construct a plural "somethings." The Stoics are committed to denying that being something requires existing (contrary to what Plato claimed, cf. *Tht.* 188E4–189A9; *Sph.* 237D1–11). On existence and subsistence, see Ierodiakonou, this volume.

12. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.70 (= LS 33C); 12 (< LS 33B); Diogenes Laertius 7.63 (< LS 33F). Cf. Frede 1994: 118; Bobzien 2003: 86; Bronowski 2019: 112–17. Some commentators disagree with this account of the ontological status of sayables. There are some striking similarities but also important differences with Frege's views about meaning: cf. Mates 1953/61: 19–26.

13. Diogenes Laertius 7.63 (< LS 33F).

14. Seneca *Ep.* 117, 2–3 (= LS 61S); Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.100 (= LS 34I); 101; Stobaeus *Ecl.* 1.8, 42 (1.106, 18–23 Wachsmuth); 1.13, 1^{c} (1.138, 14–21 Wachsmuth) (< LS 55A); Philo *de Agricultura* 141 (2.123, 10 Cohn-Wendland). The Stoics attribute important roles to predicates also in the theory of causation (cf. Stobaeus *Ecl.* 1.13, 1^{c} [1.138, 14–139, 4 Wachsmuth]; Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 9.211 = LS 55B; Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 8.9.26.3–4 = LS 55C; 8.9.30.1–3 = LS 55D; Bobzien 1999: 198–204; Bronowski 2019: 287–340) and in moral psychology (cf. Cicero, *Tusc.* IV 9, 21; Seneca *Ep.* 117, 4–5; Stobaeus *Ecl.* 2.7, 11^{f} [2.97, 15–98, 6 Wachsmuth] = LS 33J; Bronowski 2019: 369–71). On causation in Stoicism, see further Meyer, this volume.

15. Cf. Mates 1953/61: 14; Casari 2017: 17–18. On cases signified by nouns, cf. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 11.28–9. Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 8.9.26.5 = LS 33O) says that "case is agreed to be incorporeal." Some examples offered by Sextus (*Math.*

8.12; 75) presuppose that utterances of nouns signify sayables. According to one of the three Stoic definitions of predicate reported by Diogenes Laertius, "a predicate … is an incomplete sayable construed with a direct case for generating a statable" (7.64 < LS 33G): this presupposes that predicates are not the only type of incomplete sayable.

16. Cf. Frede 1978: 303–4. Diogenes Laertius (7.58 < LS 33M) attributes to Diogenes of Babylon the claim that common nouns and proper nouns signify (respectively) common qualities and proper qualities (cf. Apollonius Dyscolus *Synt.* 2.22 [142, 1–3 Uhlig]). Simplicius credits the Stoics with the view that "the qualities of bodies are corporeal, those of incorporeals incorporeal" (*in Cat.* 217, 32–3 < LS 28L, cf. 209, 1–3; Plutarch *Comm. not.* 50, 1085E; *Stoic. rep.* 43, 1054A–B < LS 47M). Just as one could hold that a set among whose elements there are concrete objects is nevertheless an abstract entity, so also one could maintain that a sayable among whose constituents there are bodies is nevertheless an incorporeal item. LS 1.200–1 think that cases are inflected forms of nouns that occur in sentences that signify complete sayables of which the cases themselves are constituents. I find this problematic: how could my utterance of "Dion is walking" signify the same as yours?

17. Diogenes Laertius 7.63 (< LS 33F); 66–8; Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.70–3; *Pyr.* 3.52. On the Stoic classification of complete sayables, see further Castagnoli, this volume, §3.4.

18. For the first account cf. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.71; for the second cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.65 (< LS 34A); Gellius *NA* 16.8, 4. The words "as far as it itself goes" are probably meant to capture Philo's concept of possibility, where external circumstances are irrelevant (cf. Barnes, Bobzien, and Mignucci 1999: 93–4; see §7): a statable is a sayable whose very nature enables it to be asserted.

19. There are other, derivative, uses of "true" and "false": cf. §8.2.

p. 366 20. (i): Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.12; 74 (= LS 34B); 207; Diogenes Laertius 7.65 (= LS 34A); 66; 68; Cicero *Acad. post.* 30, 95 (< LS 37H); (ii): Diogenes Laertius 7.65 (= LS 34A); 66; 68; Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.12; 73; Cicero *Fat.* 10, 21 (< LS 20E); 16, 38 (= LS 34AC); *Acad. post.* 29, 95 (< LS 37H); 30, 95 (< LS 37H); *Tusc.* 1.7, 14. The restriction to the times at which a statable subsists (cf. Bobzien 1986: 38) is needed because some statables perish (cf. §5.2.2): once it has perished, a statable is neither true nor false.

21. The Stoics make the truth or falsehood of statables relative only to times. Why not also to locations? For, consider one of their most frequently used examples of a statable, «IT-IS DAY»: this statable is true every day at 12.00 GMT in London but is false at that very time at London's antipode.

22. Cf. §6.

23. Diogenes Laertius 7.68–9.

24. Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 1.69 (= LS 36E). It is not clear whether the Stoics also acknowledge conjunctive connectives with three (or more) components (e.g., "both … and … and …"). They speak of a conditional where the antecedent is the conjunction of the premisses of an argument and the consequent is its conclusion (cf. §8.2), and an argument can have more than two premisses.

25. See further Castagnoli, this volume, §3.6–§3.7.

26. Diogenes Laertius 7.69 (< LS 34K) (with Goulet 1978/2006: 205–7); Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.89–90 (< LS 34G); Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 402, 8–12; Apuleius *Int.* 177, 22–7 Thomas.

27. Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.234 (< LS 37A); *Math.* 8.103 (= LS 34F); Diogenes Laertius 7.73 (< LS 35A); Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 402, 18–19. There probably was an exception to this rule: cf. note 44.

28. Cf. Barnes, Bobzien, and Mignucci 1999: 102.

29. Diogenes Laertius 7.69 (< LS 34K); Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 18, 2–7.

30. Diogenes Laertius 7.73 (< LS 35A); Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.88–90 (= LS 34G); Apollonius Dyscolus *Conj.* 218, 20–5 Schneider.

31. Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 402, 1–36; Apuleius *Int.* 177, 22–7 Thomas; Simplicius *in Cat.* 388, 24–7; 388, 30–389, 2; 405, 25–406, 5; Plutarch *Stoic. rep.* 11, 1037D–E (with Chrysippus *Quaest. Log.*, PHerc 307 col. XIII 14–33 and Stobaeus *Ecl.*

2.7, 11[e] [2.97, 21–98, 6 Wachsmuth] < LS 33J).

32. Cf. Crivelli 2007: 102.

33. Cf. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.297.

34. Cf. Simplicius *in Cat.* 396, 8–10; 13–14. Chrysippus wrote a work "On Things Said by Privation" (Diogenes Laertius 7.190).

35. Cf. §3.

36. Galen *Plac. Hippocr. Pl.* 2.2.9–11 (5.214, 18–215, 13 Kühn) (= LS 34J).

37. Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 177, 25–178, 8 (> LS 38F). On the modal properties of statables, cf. §7.

38. Apollonius Dyscolus *Synt.* 2.24 (143, 9–144, 3 Uhlig); 1.120 (101, 11–102, 3 Uhlig); Priscianus *Institutiones Grammaticae* XVII 64 (146, 15–19 Hertz), cf. Durand 2019: 4–5, 9. My use of "associated with" is intentionally ambiguous: it may be taken to mean either "identical with" or "referring to." Our sources do not enable us to adjudicate between the importantly different theories induced by these two readings. A direct demonstrative case within a predicatory statable can perhaps be also associated with an item which is not a lump of matter in the speaker's immediate environment: cf. Sextus
p. 367 Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.141; *Math.* ↳ 8.308 (in these two passages, a predicatory statable which concerns Zeus is mentioned and the speaker is said to be indicating Zeus, but, according to the Stoics, Zeus is everywhere in the universe); 297 (where a predicatory statable concerning a sign is mentioned, but, according to the Stoics, a sign is a statable and is therefore not a lump of matter but an incorporeal sayable: cf. §5.3.6); Apollonius Dyscolus *Synt.* 2.12 (135, 12–136, 4 Uhlig) (where the anaphoric use of pronouns is explained by appealing to "indications of the mind"). In some cases, the association of a direct demonstrative case (within a predicatory statable signified by an utterance of a sentence with a demonstrative pronoun in subject position) with a (corporeal or incorporeal) item is perhaps due to the item's being salient in the context of utterance: the direct demonstrative case would then be associated with the item without the need of any gesture of indication (cf. Neale 1990: 166–7). After all, the role of a gesture of indication is to connect the demonstrative element with an item, but when the item is salient the connection is achieved even without such a gesture. In other cases, the association is perhaps due to the speaker's pointing to a lump of matter which is somehow linked to the item (e.g., pointing to a priest of Zeus counts as pointing to Zeus and establishes an association of a direct demonstrative case with Zeus).

39. On nouns signifying qualities, cf. note 16. Lumps of matter are bodies whose persistence-conditions depend on their not undergoing any addition or subtraction and belong to the first of the four Stoic "categories"; qualified individuals (*poia*) are bodies whose persistence-conditions depend (in some cases) on the presence of qualities (*poiotêtes*), which in turn are portions of breath (*pneuma*) in a certain condition (*pôs echon*), and belong to the second Stoic "category." Qualified individuals coincide with lumps of matter but have different persistence-conditions. On the one hand, the lump of matter may be destroyed by undergoing addition or subtraction while the qualified individual with which it coincides persists (cf. Plutarch *Comm. not.* 44, 1083A–1084A = LS 28A), on the other, the lump of matter may persist by not undergoing any addition or subtraction while the qualified individual with which it coincides is destroyed because of some radical alteration (cf. Stobaeus *Ecl.* 1.8, 7 [1.178, 10–179, 17 Wachsmuth] < LS 28D): cf. de Harven 2022: 15–24. On the Stoic "categories," see further Ierodiakonou, this volume.

40. Dexippus *in Cat.* 11, 7–12, cf. Crivelli 1994a: 195–6; Gourinat 2000: 215.

41. Apollonius Dyscolus *Synt.* 2.32 (150, 1–4 Uhlig); Cicero *Fat.* 6, 12 (< LS 38E); 8, 15 (< LS 38E) (cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.82).

42. Cf. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.297; 308; 313; *Pyr.* 2.141.

43. The verb "to subordinate" ("*hupotattein*") seems to have served as a technical term to express the relation between a predicatory statable and the non-anaphoric simple indefinite statable to whose truth-conditions it is relevant: cf. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.297; 11.11 (< LS 30I); Crivelli 1994a: 193–4. The demonstrative aspect of predicatory statables makes them suitable to play a role in the truth-conditions of non-anaphoric simple indefinite statables because it enables them to refer to anything whatsoever, even to something that has no proper name (and could therefore not be referred to by means of a predicative statable that is not predicatory).

44. Some issues that will need to be discussed require that the (partial) truth-conditions of negations of anaphoric simple indefinite statables be specified. Now, if one utters in succession the sentences "Something is noisy" and "It is not the case

that it is disturbing," our semantic intuitions tell us that if what one says by uttering "Something is noisy" is true, then what one says by uttering "It is not the case that it is disturbing" is true just if there is at least one item that is noisy and it
p. 368 is not the case that this item is disturbing. If ↳ we develop these semantic intuitions by appealing to predicatory statables, the result is: for all predicates ρ and π, if the simple indefinite statable «IT ρ» is anaphoric on the simple non-anaphoric indefinite statable «SOMETHING π», then, for every time *t*, if «SOMETHING π» is true at *t* then the negation «NOT IT ρ» of «IT ρ» is true at *t* just if the negation of a predicatory statable «NOT δ ρ» and the predicatory statable «δ π» are both true at *t* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item.

The account just offered entails that an anaphoric simple indefinite statable and its negation can be true at the same time («SOMETHING IS-AN-ANIMAL» is true now, «IT IS-A-CAT» anaphoric on it is true now, and «NOT IT IS-A-CAT» anaphoric on it is also true now). This consequence need not however generate a difficulty for the account. For Chrysippus denied that "some conjunction of indefinite contradictories is unquestionably false" (Plutarch *Comm. not.* 2, 1059D–E < LS 37I, reading "*aoristôn*" with Long and Sedley; Wyttenbach and Cherniss prefer "*aoristôs*"; if we read "*ô ariste*" with the main MSS the passage still provides support for the interpretation suggested in the last paragraph). Thus, Chrysippus probably thought that some conjunction of contradictory indefinite statables sometimes is not false. Now, every statable is always either true or false (cf. §4); a conjunction is true just when both its conjuncts are true (cf. §5.3.1); and contradictory are those statables one of which is the negation of the other (cf. §5.2.1). So, Chrysippus probably believed that in some cases an indefinite statable and its negation are both true at the same time. Maybe he was thinking of an anaphoric simple indefinite statable and its negation.

45. Diogenes Laertius 7.72 (< LS 35A).

46. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.125–9; 418–19; *Pyr.* 2.138 (< LS 36B); 139 (< LS 36B); 234 (< LS 37A); Gellius *NA* 16.8, 10–11 (= LS 35D); Epictetus *Diss.* 2.9, 8.

47. Cicero *Fat.* 8, 15 (< LS 38E).

48. The proof (which goes beyond what is attested in our sources) is as follows. Let λ and μ be predicates and let *n* be a time. Then: [1] the simple indefinite statable «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n* just if the predicatory statable «δ λ» is true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item (by the truth-conditions of non-anaphoric simple indefinite statables); [2] if the simple indefinite statable «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n*, then the simple indefinite statable «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n* just if the predicatory statables «δ μ» and «δ λ» are both true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item (by the truth-conditions of anaphoric simple indefinite statables).

Suppose that «BOTH SOMETHING λ AND IT μ» (with «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ») is true at *n*. Then (by the truth-conditions of conjunctions) «SOMETHING λ» and «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» are both true at *n*. Since «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n*, it follows (by [2]) that «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n* just if «δ μ» and «δ λ» are both true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. But «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n*, so «δ μ» and «δ λ» are both true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. Let then δ_0 be a direct demonstrative case associated with exactly one item such that «δ_0 μ» and «δ_0 λ» are both true at *n*. Then (by the truth-conditions of conjunctions) «BOTH δ_0 λ AND δ_0 μ» is true at *n*. Therefore, δ_0 is a direct demonstrative case associated with exactly one item and «BOTH δ_0 λ AND δ_0 μ» is true at *n*, so «BOTH δ λ AND δ μ» is true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item.

Vice versa, suppose that «BOTH δ λ AND δ μ» is true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly
p. 369 one item. Let then δ_1 be a direct demonstrative case ↳ associated with exactly one item such that «BOTH δ_1 λ AND δ_1 μ» is true at *n*. Then (by the truth-conditions of conjunctions) «δ_1 λ» and «δ_1 μ» are both true at *n*. Since δ_1 is a direct demonstrative case associated with exactly one item and «δ_1 λ» is true at *n*, it follows that «δ λ» is true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item, so (by [1]) «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n*. Therefore (by [2]) «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n* just if «δ μ» and «δ λ» are both true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. Since δ_1 is a direct demonstrative case associated with exactly one item and «δ_1 μ» and «δ_1 λ» are both true at *n*, it follows that «δ μ» and «δ λ» are both true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. Hence «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n*. Since «SOMETHING λ» and «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» are both true at *n*, it follows (by the truth-conditions of conjunctions) that «BOTH SOMETHING λ AND IT μ» (with «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ») is true at *n*.

Hence «BOTH SOMETHING λ AND IT μ» (with «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ») is true at *n* just if «BOTH δ λ AND δ μ» is true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. But λ, μ, and *n* were arbitrary, so for all predicates π and ρ, «BOTH SOMETHING π AND IT ρ» (with «IT ρ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING π») is true just when «BOTH δ π

AND δ ρ» is true for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. The proof also works in the special case where a negative predicate is involved: for all predicates π and ρ, «BOTH SOMETHING π AND IT NOT ρ» (with «IT NOT ρ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING π») is true just when «BOTH δ π AND δ NOT ρ» is true for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. The Stoics may therefore be regarded as having statables that behave analogously to the particular affirmative and particular negative "categorical propositions" of Peripatetic logic but do not refer to universals. Note that the Stoic analysis differs from that of modern logic because (roughly speaking) the main "logical operator" of «BOTH SOMETHING π AND IT NOT ρ» (with «IT NOT ρ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING π») is not the "existential quantifier" SOMETHING but the "propositional connective" BOTH … AND …

49. Diogenes Laertius 7.72 (< LS 35A).

50. Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.162; Galen *Inst. log.* 5, 1 (11, 22–12, 2 Kalbfleisch); Gellius *NA* 16.8, 12–14 (= LS 35E). Other sources attest different, truth-functional truth-conditions for disjunctions: Diogenes Laertius 7.72 (< LS 35A); Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.282; 283; 468; Apollonius Dyscolus *Conj.* 216, 14–16 Schneider.

51. Diogenes Laertius 7.71 (< LS 35A); Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.109.

52. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.110; Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 177, 29 (< LS 37F).

53. Several other witnesses contain similar reports of a disagreement about the truth-conditions of conditionals: Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.112–17; 245–7; 265; 332; 428; Cicero *Acad. post.* 47, 143; Plutarch *De E ap. Delph.* 6, 386F–387A.

54. Cf. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.113–14. Philo's truth-functional account was also accepted by some Stoics: cf. Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.104–5; *Math.* 8.245–50; 449.

55. Cf. §7. On Philo and Diodorus, see Long, this volume.

56. Diogenes Laertius 7.73 (< LS 35A), cf. Cicero *Fat.* 6, 12 (< LS 38E); Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.189–91; [Galen] *Opt. sect.* 1.116, 17–117, 13 Kühn.

57. Cf. Frede 1974a: 82–90; Gourinat 2000: 221–8.

58. Galen *Inst. log.* 4, 1–2 (9, 17–10, 3 Kalbfleisch); 6, 1 (13, 18–20 Kalbfleisch); 14, 5 (33, 6–14 Kalbfleisch) (reference to times is not explicit in Galen's reports). In *Meth. Med.* 10.9, 4–5 Kühn Galen mentions ancient dialecticians who knew how to define
p. 370 what follows and ↳ what conflicts. Apollonius Dyscolus attributes to the Stoics a definition according to which "what conflicts is what cannot be accepted at the same time" (*Conj.* 218, 22–3 Schneider).

59. Cf. Bocheński 1951: 90; Mates 1953/61: 48–9; Casari 2017: 38–9.

60. Cf. Nasti De Vincentis 2006: 232–3.

61. Cf. Frede 1974a: 83–4; Barnes, Bobzien, and Mignucci 1999: 125–6.

62. Cf. §8.2.

63. Bobzien 2003: 95 points out that a passage in Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 8.254–5 = LS 51H) presupposes that the conditional «IF THIS-ONE HAS-BEEN-WOUNDED-IN-THE-HEART THIS-ONE WILL-DIE» is regarded as true and argues that this points toward what we would call "empirical incompatibility." But the passage's context seems to assume (not Chrysippus's, but) Philo's truth-conditions for conditionals.

64. Cf. §5.2.3.

65. The proof (which goes beyond what is attested in our sources) is as follows. Let λand μ be predicates and let *n* be a time. Then thesis [1] of note 48 still holds. Moreover: [3] if the simple indefinite statable «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n*, then the negation «NOT IT μ» of the simple indefinite statable «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n* just if the negation of a predicatory statable «NOT δ μ» and the predicatory statable «δ λ» are both true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item (by the truth-conditions of negations of anaphoric simple indefinite statables). Suppose that «IF SOMETHING λ IT μ» (with «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ») is true at *n*. Then (by the truth-conditions of conditionals) at *n* the negation «NOT IT μ» of «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» conflicts with «SOMETHING λ». Let δ_0 be a direct demonstrative case associated with exactly one item. Suppose (for reductio) that «δ_0 λ» and «NOT δ_0 μ» are both

true at *n*. Since δ_0 is a direct demonstrative case associated with exactly one item and «δ_0 λ» is true at *n*, it follows that «δ λ» is true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item, so (by [1]) «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n*. Then (by [3]) the negation «NOT IT μ» of «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n* just if «NOT δ μ» and «δ λ» are both true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. But, since δ_0 is a direct demonstrative case associated with exactly one item and «NOT δ_0 μ» and «δ_0 λ» are both true at *n*, it follows that «NOT δ μ» and «δ λ» are both true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item, so the negation «NOT IT μ» of «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n*. Since at *n* the negation «NOT IT μ» of «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» conflicts with «SOMETHING λ», and since «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n*, it follows that the negation «NOT IT μ» of «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» is not true at *n*, which yields a contradiction. Therefore, the truth at *n* of «δ_0 λ» excludes the truth at *n* of «NOT δ_0 μ», so at *n* «NOT δ_0 μ» conflicts with «δ_0 λ». Hence (by the truth-conditions of conditionals) the conditional «IF δ_0 λ δ_0 μ» is true at *n*. But δ_0 was arbitrarily chosen, so «IF δ λ δ μ» is true at *n* for every direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item.

Vice versa, suppose that «IF δ λ δ μ» is true at *n* for every direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. Suppose (for reductio) that «SOMETHING λ» and the negation «NOT IT μ» of «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» are both true at *n*. Since «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n*, it follows (by [3]) that the negation «NOT IT μ» of «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n* just if «NOT δ μ» and «δ λ» are both true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. But the negation «NOT IT μ» of «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» is true at *n*, so «NOT δ μ» and «δ λ» are both

p. 371 true at *n* for at least one direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. Let then δ_1 ↳ be a direct demonstrative case associated with exactly one item such that «NOT δ_1 μ» and «δ_1 λ» are both true at *n*. Since «IF δ λ δ μ» is true at *n* for every direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item, it follows that «IF δ_1 λ δ_1 μ» is true at *n*, so (by the truth-conditions of conditionals) at *n* «NOT δ_1 μ» conflicts with «δ_1 λ». Since «δ_1 λ» is true at *n*, it follows that «NOT δ_1 μ» is not true at *n*, contrary to an earlier result. Hence the truth at *n* of «SOMETHING λ» excludes the truth at *n* of the negation «NOT IT μ» of «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ», so at *n* the negation «NOT IT μ» of «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ» conflicts with «SOMETHING λ». Therefore (by the truth-conditions of conditionals) «IF SOMETHING λ IT μ» (with «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ») is true at *n*.

Therefore «IF SOMETHING λ IT μ» (with «IT μ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING λ») is true at *n* just if «IF δ λ δ μ» is true at *n* for every direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. But λ, μ, and *n* were arbitrary, so for all predicates π and ρ, «IF SOMETHING π IT ρ» (with «IT ρ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING π») is true just when «IF δ π δ ρ» is true for every direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. The proof also goes through in the special case where a negative predicate is involved: for all predicates π and ρ, «IF SOMETHING π IT NOT ρ» (with «IT NOT ρ» anaphoric on «SOMETHING π») is true just when «IF δ π δ NOT ρ» is true for every direct demonstrative case δ associated with exactly one item. The Stoics may therefore be regarded as having statables that behave analogously to the universal affirmative and universal negative "categorical propositions" of Peripatetic logic but clearly lack the "existential import" of the latter and do not refer to universals.

66. Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.100–1; 104–6 (= LS 35C); *Math.* 8.143; 151–5; 245, cf. Allen 2001: 147–93. [Galen] *Hist. Phil.* 605, 10–18 Diels attributes to "the logicians" the view that every sign (commemorative as well as indicative) is a true conditional's antecedent that is true and revelatory of its consequent.

67. Chrysippus *Quaest. Log.*, PHerc 307 col. II 10–17; Plutarch *De soll. an.* 3, 961C; Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 403, 14–18; Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 10.99–100 (with Crivelli 1994b: 490–6).

68. Cicero *Fat.* 12, 27 (< LS 70G); 7, 14 (< LS 38E); Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 10.91–2, cf. Goulet 1978/2006: 199–200.

69. Among the titles of Chrysippus's works concerning statables, Diogenes Laertius (7.190) mentions *On Things Said according to the Tenses* and *On Perfective Statables*. On the distinction of aspect in Stoic logic and its influence on traditional grammar, cf. Frede 1993.

70. Cf. final paragraph of §5.3.3.

71. Cf. Philoponus *in An. pr.* 169, 19–20.

72. Boethius *in Int. sec. ed.* 234, 22–6 (= LS 38C); 412, 16–17; Plutarch *Stoic. rep.* 46, 1055E; Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 183, 34–184, 10 (< LS 38B).

73. Cicero *Fat.* 7, 13 (< LS 38E).

74. In corner brackets the translation of the emendations of Frede 1974a: 107–14.

75. Cf. Boethius *in Int. sec. ed.* 234, 27–235, 4 (another corrupt text).

76. Here I follow Bobzien 1993: 76–80.

77. Aristotle *An. pr.* 1.14, 34^{a}16–19; 23, 40^{b}33–7; 2.2, 53^{b}16–24; *An. post.* 1.3, 73^{a}7–11; 2.11, 94^{a}21–2; 94^{a}24–7; Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 17, 10–18, 7. On Antipater, see Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.443 (< LS 36C); *Pyr.* 2.167.

78. Diogenes Laertius 7.76 (< LS 36A); Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.227.

79. Diogenes Laertius 7.77 (< LS 36A); Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.242–3.

80. Cf. Bobzien 2003: 106–7.

81. Cf. Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.137–8 (< LS 36B); *Math.* 8.417; 426.

p. 372 82. Diogenes Laertius 7.79 (< LS 36A).

83. Cicero *Acad. post.* 8, 26. Diogenes Laertius (7.45) reports that a demonstration is "an argument that from what is more apprehended establishes that which is less apprehended" (what is more, or less, apprehended is likely to be what is more, or less, *easily* apprehended). Sextus Empiricus (*Pyr.* 2.135–43 = LS 36B, *Math.* 8.300–14, 411–23) mentions different characterizations of demonstration which probably go back to the Stoics and require that every demonstration be a true (and therefore valid) argument. I cannot pursue here the delicate question of the relations between these characterizations (cf. Brunschwig 1980/95; Gourinat 2000: 271–6). On apprehension (*katalêpsis*), see Caston, this volume.

84. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.433 (< LS 36C); *Pyr.* 2.147–8.

85. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.429 (< LS 36C); 432 (< LS 36C); *Pyr.* 2.146; 147.

86. Diogenes Laertius 7.194.

87. Galen *Inst. log.* 19, 6 (49, 1–9 Kalbfleisch), cf. Frede 1974b: 101–2. Sub-syllogistic arguments: Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 84, 6–19; 373, 29–35. Non-methodically valid arguments: Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 21, 28–22, 23; Philoponus *in An. pr.* 36, 5–13. It may be plausibly conjectured that arguments of what we would now call "predicate logic" were ranked by the Stoics among the non-methodically valid arguments (with the missing premiss being a thesis of predicate logic whose addition yields a Stoic syllogism): cf. Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.141 (< LS 36B); *Math.* 8.308; Frede 1974b: 102; Gourinat 2000: 295–6.

88. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.223.

89. Aristotle *An. pr.* 1.1, 24^{b}22–6.

90. Alexander of Aphrodisias *in Top.* 10, 6–12; *in An. pr.* 18, 12–20; 164, 27–31.

91. Aristotle *An. pr.* 1.1, 24^{b}18–20; 23, 40^{b}31–3; 2.16, 65^{a}7–9; *An. post.* 1.3, 73^{a}4–6; *Soph. el.* 5, 167^{a}25–6; 6, 168^{b}25–6; Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 18, 8–19, 3.

92. The argument «IF NOT IT-IS DAY IT-IS DAY, NOT IT-IS DAY, THEREFORE IT-IS DAY» is an indemonstrable both of the first and of the second kind.

93. Diogenes Laertius 7.80–1 (< LS 36A); Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.224–6; *Pyr.* 2.157–8.

94. Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 1.69 (= LS 36E).

95. Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 20, 5–10; Galen *Inst. log.* 7, 1 (16, 19–17, 4 Kalbfleisch); [Ammonius] *in An. pr.* 68, 6–7.

96. Diogenes Laertius 7.195; Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.229–41 (> LS 36G).

97. Cf. Galen *Inst. log.* 6, 5 (14, 22–15, 7 Kalbfleisch).

98. Cf. Milne 1995: 44, 49.

99. Cf. Mueller 1979: 205; Milne 1995: 59.

100. My translation is based on the text of De Lacy 1978.

101. On (2), cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias *in An. pr.* 164, 27–31.

102. Was this the "indeterminate matter" mentioned by Alexander (*in An. pr.* 164, 30) in connection with the second posit? If they accepted *ex contradictione quodlibet*, the Stoics must have adopted something like the modal account of conflict (cf. §5.3.4).

103. A slightly different version of the third posit is reported by Alexander (*in An. pr.* 278, 11–14 = LS 36J).

104. Cf. Frede 1974a: 193; Bobzien 1996: 156; Bobzien 2003: 117.

105. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.235–7 (< LS 36G). Sextus points out that the syllogism is "woven" from non-homogeneous items (i.e., a second and a third indemonstrable).

106. It might be objected that we have obtained syllogisms with redundant premisses, contrary to a view that can be plausibly
p. 373 attributed to the Stoics (cf. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* ↳ 8.429 < LS 36C; 431 < LS 36C; 438–9; *Pyr.* 2.146; 147). The objection is serious. It is answered by pointing out that the Stoics are in any case committed to syllogisms with redundant premisses: by applying the third posit as it is handed down in **T13** to the first indemonstrable «IF α α, α ⇒ α» and to the fourth (or fifth) indemonstrable «EITHER α OR NOT α, α ⇒ α» we obtain the redundant «IF α α, EITHER α OR NOT α, α ⇒ α». The Stoics perhaps only required avoidance of redundant premisses for arguments used in dialectical debates while lifting the ban for syllogisms. (For a different solution, cf. Bobzien 2019: 21–2.)

107. Origen *Cels.* 7, 15 (= LS 36F). Cf. Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.3.

108. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.230–3 (< LS 36G). Sextus remarks that the syllogism is "woven" from homogeneous items (i.e., two first indemonstrables) (cf. note 105).

109. On the distinction between "operational" and "structural" rules, cf. Bobzien 2019: 15.

110. The completeness proof may be found in Crivelli 1992: 212–28. Milne 1995: 58–64 proves that Stoic syllogistic (on reconstructions equivalent to or even stronger than my preferred one) fails to be complete when conditionals and disjunctions are interpreted in a non-truth-functional way. My account of the last three posits is very different from the one now most widely accepted, to be found in Bobzien 1996: 142–71, Bobzien 2003: 104–23, and Bobzien 2019: 6–8. Bobzien takes the last three posits to be specific cases of the cut rule. This fits well with Alexander's claim (*in An. pr.* 284, 11–17, cf. 278, 6–8) that the second, third, and fourth posit of the Stoics are equivalent to the Peripatetic "synthetic theorem," which is a cut rule (cf. 274, 19–24; 278, 7–11). Alexander could however mean that while the Peripatetics are able to develop their syllogistic by means a rule of contraposition and a cut rule, the Stoics need a rule of contraposition (i.e., the first posit) and three other rules (i.e., the second, third, and fourth posit): the equivalence mentioned by Alexander could boil down to a comparison of the number of rules needed by the two schools to develop their syllogistics (cf. Mignucci 1993: 225–6). Bobzien also takes the first argument to which any of the last three posits applies to have exactly two premisses. This does not match with the "dialectical theorem" which Sextus Empiricus (cf. *Math.* 8.231) attributes to the Stoics and which Bobzien 2003: 112 takes to be equivalent to the conjunction of the last three posits. Bobzien and Dyckhoff 2018 and Bobzien 2019 examine some syntactic properties of the logical system they attribute to the Stoics (the system, among other things, turns out to be decidable). Diogenes Laertius (7.79 < LS 36A) credits the Stoics with the claim that "every argument is woven" from the five Chrysippean indemonstrables: if "every argument" is short for "every valid argument," this amounts to a completeness claim (cf. Sextus Empiricus *Pyr.* 2.156; 194).

111. More on Stoic sophisms in Mates 1953/61: 84–5; Barnes, Bobzien, and Mignucci 1999: 157–76; Gourinat 2000: 276–81.

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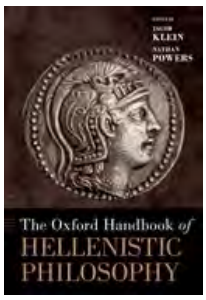
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CHAPTER

16 The Stoics on Mental Representation

Victor Caston

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Abstract

This chapter concerns the Stoics' conception of mental representation or *phantasia*, which is central to their entire theory of mind, but especially to their discussions of knowledge and moral responsibility. *Phantasia* is a state of the soul that possesses content because of its intrinsic features and the way in which it is produced. The Stoics further distinguish a particular class of representations, the "secure" ones (*phantasiai katalêptikai*), which they take to be a criterion of truth—namely, those which are produced by something so as to correspond to it exactly, in a uniquely identifying way, and which could not have been produced by anything else. Not every perceptual representation is secure in this way; but by examining the conditions that secure representations must meet and seeing the way other representations fail to meet them, we can understand the nature of representations more generally. On the Stoic account, every perceptual representation, whether rational or nonrational, corresponds to a *lekton* that has the representation's content embedded within it. In the rational case, the presence of concepts (*ennoiai*) enables the subject to reflect on and articulate this content.

Keywords: phantasia, representation, criterion of truth, content, lekton, concept, ennoiai, knowledge, epistemology, Stoics

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A key element in the Stoics' discussions of knowledge and responsibility, indeed in their philosophy more generally, is a state they call *phantasia*.[1] The term, possibly first coined by Plato, is used prominently in his *Theaetetus* to characterize Protagoras's view that things are just as they appear (*phainesthai*, 152B11–C3; cf. 161E8). This core notion is evident in the Stoics too, for whom *phantasia* is a state in virtue of which things *appear* to that subject in a certain way: such states *represent* things as being that way, whether or not the subject endorses it as correct. As the Stoics develop the idea, it is a state that has content because of its intrinsic

features and the way in which it is produced. I will use "representation" for *phantasia* in what follows as providing a natural, yet accurate rendering of the Stoics' usage, rather than try to preserve the etymological connection with "appearing" or follow the popular Humean term "impression" (preferred in the rest of this handbook).[2] The former proves awkward in English, while the latter would trivialize the Stoic definition of *phantasia* as an impression or imprint (*tupôsis*), making it a tautology, rather than a substantive claim about the causal and physical nature of representation.[3]

1. Representation as the Mark of the Psychological

One of the most striking features of the Stoic account is how they use representation to demarcate what essentially involves the mind from other natural phenomena. The idea that psychology, in a sense recognizable to us, concerns a distinctive range of phenomena first arises in Western philosophy only with the Stoics.

Stoicism regards objects in the natural world as distinguished by layers of increasing complexity, the so-called
p. 377 *scala naturae*, depending on how their underlying material ↳ is organized.[4] The integrity of all bodies is due to their *cohesion*; the vital functions of plants and other living things is due to their *nature*; cognition and goal-directed behavior in animals is due to their *soul*; and the intellectual and moral character of humans is due to *reason* (LS 47N–S).[5] The division of labor is significant. Whereas Plato and Aristotle regarded the soul (*psuchê*) as the principle of life, in virtue of which living things are alive (*Phd.* 105c; *DA* 2.2, 413a20–b13), the Stoics demote metabolism, growth, and reproduction to a thing's nature (*phusis*). What distinguishes animals from plants is the fact that animals additionally have representations and make efforts (*hormai*):[6]

> **T1** Things without a soul move on their own while those with a soul move by their own [agency]: they move by their own [agency] because a representation arises that elicits effort, and representations elicit effort in animals because their representational nature initiates effort in an orderly way. A representation of spinning, for example, arises in a spider and an effort to spin follows, because its representational nature draws it towards this in an orderly way, without the animal relying on anything other than its representational nature. Similarly with a bee building its hive.
>
> (Orig. *Princ.* 3.1.2, 196.12–197.8 Koetschau > LS 53A4)[7]

Animals, that is, are sensitive to their circumstances and the opportunities they afford, and they respond appropriately by pursuing certain ends such as food and shelter or avoiding dangers. Representation is largely passive, the capacity to be struck by the world in certain ways, whereas effort is active, the capacity to respond and engage. But both essentially involve content, about how things are or should be, and so will be satisfied or frustrated by how the world actually is. It should be no surprise, then, that the Stoics define effort as a response to a representation with a specific kind of content.[8] Consequently, what distinguishes the soul—or as we might reasonably call it, the mind—is simply representation: only things with minds have representations.

For the Stoics, representation is not just a distinctive feature of the mind, but a pervasive one. All mental states are analyzed in terms of representation: they are either representations themselves or the assent (*sunkatathesis*) to a representation.[9] But then it follows that all and only mental states involve representations. For the Stoics, therefore, representation is the mark of the mental. What distinguishes animals from other things, living or non-living, is their *psychology*, where this is understood in terms of intentionality. Brentano would have felt right at home.[10]

2. Making an Impression: A Causal Theory of Representation

To speak of representations as mental states, though, does not imply that they are not physical. The Stoics
p. 378 insist that all mental states must be understood causally, which for ↳ them entails that they must be physical states too, much as Donald Davidson argued: only bodies can act and be acted upon.[11] Except that Stoic monism is not "anomalous": mental states are as such fully integrated into the physical laws that determine all outcomes.[12] Psychological phenomena are not separate from the natural world, but a part of it. Their approach to the mind is part and parcel of their more general corporealism.[13]

The Stoics think of representations as the governing part (*hêgemonikon*) of the soul's being in a certain state (*pôs echon*), just as a fist is a hand in a certain state.[14] More specifically, Zeno and Cleanthes define a representation as an impression (*tupôsis*) made on the soul, which they conceive of in strongly physical terms: it is due to the impact of external objects on our senses, which they compare with the seal a signet ring produces in wax.[15] As should already be clear from this definition, Stoic discussions are framed primarily in terms of perceptual representations, and while these are not the only kind of representation, they figure as the central or paradigmatic case (LS 39A4). To avoid the suggestion that objects literally make an indentation on the soul, Chrysippus preferred to characterize representation as an alteration (*heteroiôsis*). But he saw this as explaining the true sense behind Zeno's definition and continued to use the language of "being stamped and sealed" in the definition of a secure representation (*phantasia katalêptikê*).[16] Later Stoics even claim that animals are aware of their own bodies due to the soul's being in contact with every part (Hierocles *Elem. eth.* 4.38–53 > LS 53A6–9).

The wax seal analogy is also important epistemologically, in so far as it suggests the authority our perceptions carry. Because of the level of detail in signet rings and the way in which they produce seals, they are a highly trustworthy way of authenticating messages and documents as having originated from a specific source. A seal does this by taking on the insignia from the ring and thereby represents its owner. Perceptual representations, similarly, are standardly produced in such a way that they bear the authoritative stamp of the objects in the world they represent. Elsewhere the Stoics speak of the senses as relaying reports to the soul's governing part, like messengers to a king (LS 53G7).

Chrysippus has more to say about the relation between the content of a representation and its cause. According to Aetius he distinguished two pairs of items. The first pair concerns the basic case:

> **T2** (1) REPRESENTATION [*phantasia*]: a modification [*pathos*] occurring in the soul that reveals both itself and its producer. For example, whenever we observe something white by sight, the effect in the soul due to seeing is a modification, and in virtue of this modification we are able to assert that there is something white at its basis acting on us, and likewise for touch and smelling. The word "*phantasia*" [representation] is derived from "*phôs*" [light]. For just as light displays both itself and the things enveloped in it, so a representation displays both itself and what produced it.
>
> (2) REPRESENTED OBJECT [*phantaston*] the object that produces the representation—e.g. something white or cold or whatever can act on the soul—is a represented object.
>
> (Aetius 4.12.1–3, *Dox. Gr.* 401.15–402.9 = LS 39B2–3)

p. 379 Two features of Chrysippus's framework immediately stand out. First, it is emphatically causal. It states twice that a representation is about its cause: what produces the impression is what that representation is *of*. As we shall see shortly, he will qualify this, introducing different terminology in cases where what is represented is *not* the cause. But in the paradigmatic case, content is tied intimately to cause. A second striking feature of the framework is its phenomenological character. A representation does not merely provide information or evidence of its cause. It "reveals" and "displays" the represented object to the subject, along with itself. This

fact, together with the comparison to light, suggests a kind of conscious experience in which we are aware of both the object and the experience together, integrally, in a single mental event, rather than one awareness alongside another. The light of awareness not only makes objects and their features available to inspection, but itself as well. Unsurprisingly, the Stoics regard this "natural light" as offering a foundation for their epistemology:

> **T3** … representation is the criterion [of truth], since nature provides us with the power of perception and the representation that comes about through it as illumination, so to speak, for recognizing the truth. It is absurd, then, for someone to reject so great a power and eliminate what serves as their own light.
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 7.259–60)

When an Academic claimed that nothing could be securely grasped, the Stoic Aristo of Chios asked whether he could see the person sitting next to him. When the Academic denied it, Aristo quoted a comic fragment, "Who blinded you, then? Who snuffed your torch's beams?" (Cratinus 459 Kock = Diogenes Laertius 7.163), to which the expected reply is "*No one*."[17]

If Chrysippus's distinction was intended as an account of representation, though, it seems vulnerable to a glaring objection. Even if we accept that *perception* can be profitably analyzed along causal lines, where what we perceive is the very object that brings about that perception, it would be a surprising thing to think about *representation* generally. We commonly suppose that some of our experiences are true and others false, where the latter is due to something other than what we seem to be experiencing; and our sources frequently ascribe a similar view to the Stoics, where it is stated in terms of true and false representations.[18] Indeed, this is precisely what we should expect, if *all* mental states either are or essentially involve representations, as the Stoics believe.

The continuation of the report in **T2**, though, makes clear that Chrysippus had such cases in view all along. He uses different terminology to distinguish them from the basic case of representation he began with:

> **T4** (3) REPRESENTATION-LIKE STATE [*phantastikon*]: an empty directing of attention, a modification in the soul that does *not* arise from anything represented, as happens when someone struggles against phantoms and grabs at emptiness. For there is a represented object at the basis of a representation,
p. 380 but there is none at the basis of a representation-like state. ↳
>
> (4) WHAT IS MERELY REPRESENTED [*phantasma*]: that towards which we are directed by an empty representation-like directing of attention. This happens with people who are disturbed or have gone insane.
>
> (Aetius 4.12.4–5, *Dox. Gr.* 402.10–20 = LS 39B5–6)

Chrysippus does *not* say that representation-like states are without any cause at their basis, just that they are not caused *by what they represent*. Content and cause diverge: such states are not about what brings them about. Our attention is drawn toward something else, which does not exist and so is merely represented. A representation-like state must therefore have another cause, such as our own internal condition.[19]

It is difficult to know the further implications of these distinctions without knowing more about the context in which they were used, which we lack. For example, if they were intended as the framework for a general account of representation, then a causal relation to its object would be *essential* to representations properly speaking, and however similar "representation-like states" are phenomenally, they would still be a distinct type of mental state. Chrysippus would then be a *disjunctivist*, holding that despite their phenomenal similarity, such states do not share a common genus or type, but must be treated disjunctively as divided into two more

fundamental types. That might seem tempting, given that Chrysippus himself seems to distinguish a "good case"—which could be regarded as representation in the strict sense—and a "bad" or defective case, that approximates it phenomenally at best. But Chrysippus's distinctions do not quite line up good and bad cases as one might expect. Since the distinction only turns on whether the object exists and is its cause, it will turn out that perceptual illusions, which are caused by the object while misrepresenting them in some way, will be good cases rather than bad ones,[20] as when Orestes in his madness perceived his sister Electra, but took her to be a Fury (LS 39G9), or Heracles fatefully mistook his own children for Eurystheus's (LS 40H2). A more serious problem is our textual evidence. All the other reports of Stoic views, including Chrysippus's, treat representation as a broad class, which includes not only true and false representations, but illusory and hallucinatory ones too. The definition of a "secure representation" (*phantasia katalêptikê*, see §3) seeks to distinguish this privileged kind *from other representations* that fall short of its requirements, sometimes radically. In fact, there is no other text that treats "representation" as restricted to the narrow case marked in **T3**, or even uses the term "representation-like" for bad cases.

It would be better, then, *not* to take these distinctions as constituting the framework for a general account of representation, but as using certain central cases to draw distinctions, marked with certain labels just for that occasion. If that is right, then we should understand "representation" in virtually all Stoic texts as referring to the broadest class, with the narrower class picked out in **T3** simply as a paradigmatic case and *not* as the strict sense of "representation." The strict sense is the *broad sense*. And this is just what one would expect if the Stoics think representations are essentially involved in *every* mental state, as argued in §1.

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3. Varieties of Representation

The greatest source of information we have about Stoic representation comes from their epistemology, in particular the discussions surrounding one special type of representation that they took to serve as a foundation for knowledge (LS 41B3). The definition they offered became a flashpoint in their debates with Academic skeptics, who devised numerous counterexamples. But the epistemological controversy is of only secondary interest here. For if the definition sets out substantive and independent conditions a representation must meet in order to play its foundational role, it thereby reveals dimensions along which other representations differ and fall short. In fact, Chrysippus recognizes borderline cases where the difference is so slight that it is nearly impossible to distinguish them, as well as cases much further apart (LS 37F). The definition can thus tell us about Stoic representations more generally, once its conditions have been properly understood. But we must begin with its relation to knowledge.

The Stoics held that for anything to count as knowledge (*epistêmê*), it must be such that it "cannot be overturned by argument" (LS 41B1, C2). What is at issue is not the strength of one's subjective conviction, but the relation of knowledge to other mental states that can be brought to bear against it. This requirement places significant constraints on one's belief set as a whole. On their view, it must not include any falsehoods (LS 41D3, E, G1), while also being so comprehensive and systematically integrated that no new evidence or theoretical considerations could ever give us sufficient reason to abandon it. Very few humans attain this, if any—only the so-called sage, an ideal construct used for thinking about the theory's demands in concrete terms. Nevertheless, all of us possess the building blocks necessary for such knowledge, namely, individual experiences that are not only true, but well-founded, and which would constitute knowledge if sufficient numbers were organized in the right way. Zeno called this basic state a "secure grasp" (*katalêpsis*), a metaphor he illustrated with a series of gestures: a representation is like an open palm, where anything resting on it is open to view; assent is like gripping it lightly with one's fingers; a secure grasp is like making a fist around it, to hold it firmly; and knowledge is like compressing one's fist further with the other hand (LS 41A). A secure grasp, then, consists in assenting to a suitable representation (LS 40B, 41B–C), and Zeno went on to specify the conditions that make it suitable, labeling it a "secure representation" (*phantasia katalêptikê*).[21] All subsequent

debate turns on the adequacy of this definition, which seems to have been restricted to perceptual representations.[22]

We can be relatively certain of the canonical form of Zeno's definition, as it is repeated in many sources with only slight variations (e.g., LS 40C–E). According to Cicero, it initially consisted of two conditions, but Zeno added a third in response to an objection of Arcesilaus's:

p. 382 A *secure* representation is a representation that is

i. from something that is

ii. stamped and sealed in accordance with the very thing that is

iii. such that it could not come from something that is not.

Much turns on the interpretation of the phrase "something that is" (*huparchon*) which recurs in each clause. But several things are already clear. To begin with, the first condition is *causal:* what a representation "comes from" is what produces it or brings it about, as virtually everyone agrees.[23] The second condition requires a kind of *correspondence* with the object mentioned in (i) that produced it. The phrase in (ii), "stamped and sealed" (to which some versions add "molded") "in accordance with" the object, is an allusion to the sealing wax analogy. The seal represents the ring and thereby its owner because it is produced in such a way that each of its features matches exactly the features of the ring's uniquely identifying insignia. A secure representation is meant to work in the same way. Whether it is a literal impression or some other kind of alteration, it represents the object that produced it thoroughly and accurately; indeed, as two of our sources explain, it captures *all* of the object's distinctive features, or at any rate all those accessible to the type of sense involved (LS 40E3, 6; 41B3). This sets both (*a*) a *precision requirement* and (*b*) an *accuracy requirement* on such representations. In order for a representation to be secure, it must be produced in such a way that

a. it represents *all* the object's distinctive features accessible to that type of sense;

b. each feature it represents *matches* the corresponding feature of the object *exactly*.[24]

The third condition, finally, is a *modal claim* about whether alternate causal histories are possible: it maintains that a secure representation *could not* have come about in another way. Something like the third condition holds for wax seals: they authenticate documents precisely because they could not have been produced in virtually any other way than by the owner's signet ring. Analogously, the Stoics hold, secure representations have authority because of the only way in which they *could* be produced. Such a modal claim is obviously not entailed by the first two conditions, as is sometimes claimed, although Zeno may have tacitly assumed it, given the background theory and possibly other assumptions, such as the identity of indiscernibles.

Taken together, all three conditions are meant to explain why such representations are secure in the way seals are: each is produced by something in such a way as to represent accurately all its uniquely identifying features and could not have resulted in any other way. To delve any more deeply, though, it is necessary to construe the recurrent phrase "something that is" (*huparchon*). Many translations render the verb EXISTENTIALLY, taking the three conditions to require a real object, as distinct from something merely represented, as in hallucinations and delusions, which the Stoics sometimes mention. But it is hard to see why such extreme failures should be so prominent, when error regarding existent objects is far more widespread in our experience. An existential
p. 383 reading ↳ would, moreover, trivialize the three conditions. Since nothing is or could be produced by a non-existent object, a fortiori no representation could be either; but then (i) will be *vacuously satisfied*, as will (iii), since no representation could ever violate them.[25] On this reading, then, the only substantive condition will be (ii). But (ii) alone is inadequate to the task that secure representations were meant to serve. The accuracy requirement yields nothing stronger than truth, not the infallible guarantee that the Stoics seek from a criterion.

A second interpretation, favored by many scholars, construes the phrase "something that is" VERIDICALLY, so that it stands in each condition for "what *is true*" or "*is the case*," based on the Stoics' claim that a true proposition is one that "obtains" (*huparchei*, LS 34D1).[26] But this will not help either. For so understood, (i) would require a representation to be produced by a proposition (*axiôma*) or state-of-affairs (*pragma*) that obtains, both of which they regard as incorporeal.[27] And that conflicts with their causal doctrines, since they hold that only bodies can be causes (note 11). Nor can these be reconciled: we cannot insist both that the Stoics are using these terms in their technical senses *and* that they are applying them loosely.[28] Moreover, even if one granted that they were causes in some loose sense, the veridical reading would still trivialize the three conditions. Since nothing is or could be produced by a state-of-affairs that does not obtain, a fortiori no representation can either. So once again (i) and (iii) will be *vacuously satisfied*, leaving (ii) as the only substantive condition. Worse, (i) already guarantees the truth of the representation, since on this reading it requires that the state-of-affairs *obtains*; but then the accuracy requirement in (ii) is superfluous. So (ii) will add at most that the representation must be highly detailed or (as some claim) pictorial or vivid.[29]

Something has clearly gone off. Instead of treating *huparchein* as the equivalent of "to be" (*einai*) and then disambiguating accordingly, we should revisit ordinary uses of *huparchein* to see whether they shed any light. In one use, it indicates what is *actually present* under the circumstances in question, where the contrast is with things not currently in those circumstances, though they might be present in other places or at other times.[30] What counts as present is contextually determined: it depends on the purposes and scope implicit in the discussion in which the term is used. In speaking about time, for example, the Stoics say that what has happened or is going to happen is not present, though it subsists, whereas what is ongoing (*enestêkos*) is alone present (*huparchei*, LS 51B4, C5). In semantics, they claim that while predicates (*katêgorêmata*) are generally said of or applied to objects, they are present (*huparchein*) only when they actually inhere or belong to them (LS 51B4, 55A1). Similarly, a proposition is true just in case it both has a contradictory and is present, that is, currently obtains, even if it is in the past or future tense and so about things that are not themselves present (LS 34D1, 51H).

If this is right, then we might expect that when it comes to secure representations, what is present is just what can be found *in the immediate environment* of the perceiving subject. But this is not quite right, as an objection from Sextus makes clear. He argues that when the Stoics go on and try to define what is present, they get caught in a vicious circle:

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> **T5** But since everything taught through definition is taught on the basis of things known, when we further ask what "present" is exactly, they turn around and say that what is present is *what triggers a secure representation*. So in order to comprehend the secure representation, we have to have already grasped what is present; but to do that, we have to turn to the secure representation. So neither is clarified, as each requires support from the other.
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 7.426, with variants at 8.86, 11.183; *PH* 3.242)

The charge of circularity overreaches: unless the Stoics *defined* being present in terms of secure representations, there are not two priority claims in conflict; whereas if, as is more likely, they merely *described* what is present in this way, as what triggers a secure representation, then mutual implication is precisely what we should expect—one claim is *true* if, and only if, the other is. Nevertheless, in setting up his objection Sextus includes a crucial detail that reveals exactly how the Stoics construe presence in this context. They specify it *in causal terms*: something is present in the relevant sense if, and only if, it is *acting on the subject's senses* in the appropriate way. Many, though not all, of the objects in your immediate environment are present in this sense, so long as they stand in the right relations to your senses and are not occluded or masked; even objects that are not in your physical vicinity but very far away, such as the stars, might satisfy this condition. In contrast, LSD in your synapses triggering total hallucinations does not satisfy it, despite the drug's location within you, since

the hallucinations do not come from something present in the relevant sense: the drug is not acting directly on your senses, but on the central organ inside.

This CAUSAL READING has two significant ramifications. First, if a secure representation is defined as a representation that is

i ′.from something *present*,

ii ′.stamped and sealed in accordance with the very thing that is *present*,

iii ′.such that it could not come from something that is *not present*,

where "present" is understood causally in this way, then each condition is substantive. The first condition is not vacuous, since not all representations satisfy it: there are representations, like hallucinations, that are not brought about by an object acting on the senses. Nor is the third condition vacuous. In some cases, a representation *could* have been brought about by something that is not present, if that thing *had been* present and acted on the subject's senses. To satisfy the third condition, then, a representation could not have come from something that exists, but is not actually present, if it had been present and acted in the appropriate ways.[31]

Reading the third condition in this way would explain the Academics' repeated appeal to counterexamples involving the possibility of *exact* or *near duplicates* having been switched—twins, coins, eggs, and snakes poking their heads out of a basket—where it is implausible to think one could tell if either had been swapped
p. 385 for the other. I am in fact looking at Tweedledee; but could I tell if Tweedledum had taken his place? ↳ The Stoics respond that some people *can* (e.g., their mother) because there are telltale, though possibly subtle, features that differentiate them (LS 40I2); and when we perceive these securely, the representation could not have been brought about by the other twin. Such scenarios are highly relevant if "present" is construed causally: what matters is not whether the representation could be produced by a non-existent object or non-obtaining state-of-affairs, but whether actual objects with a very similar causal profile could produce an intrinsically indistinguishable representation if switched.[32] What the Stoics require is a representation that not only captures the true object in its unique particularity, fully and accurately, but also could not have been produced by a duplicate. Such a representation would *guarantee* the truth of the representation and so could serve as a criterion of truth. The causal reading thus makes better sense of the Stoic-Academic debate.

A second ramification, important for our purposes here, is that on this reading the three conditions are not only substantive, but independent. Because a representation can meet some of these conditions without satisfying others, the definition not only tells us about secure representations, but also identifies dimensions along which representations vary more broadly.[33] According to Diogenes Laertius, a representation will be "insecure" (*akatalêpton*) if either (*a*) it is "*not* from something present" or (*b*) it is from something present, but not "in accordance with" it (LS 40C3). The first case, (*a*), occurs when condition (i′) fails to be satisfied. The representation does *not* come from something presently acting on our senses.[34] Rather it is due to some other cause: it comes about "extraneously and by chance" by conditions within the subject (LS 40E1), as happens with hallucinations and dreams. But failure to satisfy (i′) does not preclude such representations being *true*, something implied by (ii′). For hallucinations and dreams can still represent real objects; and it is possible, at least in principle, that they do so accurately and precisely, and therefore "in accordance" with objects or events, as prophetic dreams were thought to be. Since they would not be produced *from* what is represented, though, they will not strictly satisfy (ii′), as they will not be "stamped and sealed" by those objects' presently acting on our senses. But they might still be true, accurate, and precise.

The second case, (*b*), where (i′) is satisfied but not (ii′), is far more common. In such cases, even though we perceive an object due to its presently acting on our senses, for various reasons we *misrepresent* or *mischaracterize* it: the representation might be *imprecise*, as when someone misplaces their glasses and sees

only blurrily (what the Greeks refer to as being "dull-sighted"); or it might be an *illusion*, such as seeing two Thebes or two suns as the result of intoxicants or pressing one's eye, or when a dress appears white and gold, despite actually being blue and black.[35] The Stoics cite even more dramatic cases drawn from tragedy: Heracles, for example, mistaking his own children for Eurystheus's and killing them, or Orestes fleeing from his own sister, taking her to be a Fury.[36] Later Stoics called such misrepresentations "misimpressions" (*paratupôtikai*).[37]

Finally, a representation can satisfy both (i′) and (ii′) yet fail to satisfy (iii′). Because it meets the first two conditions, it represents its cause accurately and precisely, and so is true. But it fails to meet the third: it could
p. 386 have been produced by another object not ↳ presently acting on our senses, had it been present and acting on them. So even though we in fact get things right, we are still vulnerable to *misidentifications*: we might have had the wrong duplicate. Such a representation would not be secure: there could be another representation exactly like it intrinsically, but arising from something else, rendering it fallible.[38] If so, a variant formulation of the third condition in Cicero gets things exactly right: a secure representation is "such that it could not come from *something it is not from*," however similar (*Acad.* 2.18).[39]

4. Content

It is worth noting that none of the evidence we have considered so far mentions the Stoics' notion of *lekta* or "what can be said." This stands in marked contrast to much of the secondary literature. But the exposition here follows the Stoics' own recommendation, which begins the study of dialectic with representations, before *lekta*:

> **T6** The Stoics hold that the account of representation and perception should come first, in so far as the criterion by which the truth of things is recognized is, as regards its genus, a representation; and in so far as the account of assent, a secure grasp, and thought, which precede accounts of subsequent states, cannot be formulated without representation. For representation arises first and then discursive thought expresses in language what it undergoes due to representation.
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.49 = LS 39A1–2; cf. 53U6–7)

Mental representation is thus taken to have priority over language, both in the order of causes and in the order of exposition. Many scholars have thought that the reverse priority holds. They hold that the content of representations derives from the associated *lekta*, which in turn depends on the concepts an individual possesses. Consequently, representations do not have content on their own prior to *lekta* or concepts.[40] Such readings raise troubling questions about representations in human children as well as nonhuman animals, who lack both reason and concepts on the Stoic view.[41] In what follows, I shall argue for a different interpretation.

That there is a close connection between *lekta* and representations is not in question, since the Stoics seem to define the former in terms of the latter. Virtually the same formulation appears in Diogenes Laertius (7.63 = LS 33F2) and Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 8.70 = LS 33C):

> **T7** The Stoics state that a *lekton* is what subsists in accordance with a rational representation

to which Sextus immediately adds

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> **T8** and a rational representation is that in accordance with which what is represented can be set out in language.

Much hinges on what precisely is meant by the phrase, "subsists in accordance with." The Stoics held that the four kinds of "incorporeal"—*lekta*, time, place, and void—do not exist (*einai*), but subsist (*huphistanai*), a distinction that may be implied in **T7**.[42] But it is also unclear whether the relation expressed by "in accordance with" (*kata*) is merely covariation or rather some form of grounding, both of which can be signified by the

Greek.[43] But as it is not further explicated in our sources, I will speak simply of "correspondence," so as not to prejudge the correct interpretation.

These ontological issues are controversial in their own right.[44] But they are in fact orthogonal to the debate about representational content, which arises from another text of Diogenes Laertius, at least given certain tacit assumptions. It reports a seemingly innocuous classification:

> **T9** Some representations are rational, others nonrational: the ones that belong to rational animals are rational, the ones that belong to nonrational animals nonrational. The rational ones are thoughts, while the nonrational ones lack a name.
>
> (Diogenes Laertius 7.51 = LS 39A6)

T9 might be thought to imply further consequences. If nonrational representations cannot also be rational, for example, the division is *dichotomous*: no representations of rational animals are nonrational and no representations of nonrational animals are rational. If, moreover, the division is not simply a matter of taxonomic labels but holds in virtue of some distinctive characteristic of rational representations, it follows that nonrational representations *differ in kind* from rational ones. The standard view makes both assumptions and identifies this feature with having a corresponding *lekton*, based on **T7–8**:

> A. All and only rational representations have a *lekton* corresponding to them.

The idea behind (A) is that only rational animals possess concepts and so only they can have *lekta* corresponding to their representations. (I will challenge the latter claim later in the chapter.) In the case of perceptual representations specifically, this *lekton* will be an *axiôma* or proposition; other representations may have other types of *lekton* associated with them.[45] If, moreover, the *lekton* corresponding to a representation just *is* its content, as is standardly assumed, then it will follow that all and only rational representations have content—no nonrational ones do.[46] Call this the "STRICT DICHOTOMY READING."[47]

Several interpreters go even further. If no rational representation has content apart from the *lekton* corresponding to it, and which *lekton* corresponds to a representation depends on the concepts an individual subject possesses and applies to it, it follows that

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> B. No rational representation has content prior to conceptualization.

That is, there is *no nonconceptual content* in a rational representation, which then has a conceptual scheme imposed on it. On this view, all content is essentially conceptual. Call this the "CONCEPTUALIST READING."[48] (I discuss this view in §5.)

Certain texts are standardly cited in support of the strict dichotomy reading. In **T9**, for example, rational representations are called "thoughts" (*noêseis*), while nonrational representations are not. There are also texts in Cicero and Sextus that claim that while the senses apprehend qualities like white and sweet, they cannot grasp even the most basic propositional content, such as "this is white" or "this is sweet," which instead requires reason.[49] None of this is decisive, however. The label "thoughts" on its own is not sufficient, as is clear from Descartes's *Meditations*, which exploits several notions of Stoic provenance, such as clarity and distinctness (*Med.* III) and responsibility for assent (*Med.* IV). Descartes applies "thought" to mental states right across the board, including emotions, willing and, crucially, sense-perceptions (*Med.* II), as the acts of a unitary mind, much as the Stoics hold (LS 53H1).[50] Without further clarification about what the Stoics take "thoughts" to be, then, we cannot conclude anything more probative from **T9**.[51] The other texts invoked are more explicit, but neither Cicero nor Sextus ascribes the view to the Stoics. Sextus develops the view in a purely exploratory fashion in the course of argument, without any indications in context as to which philosophers hold the view, if any. Cicero does attribute it, but to an Academic, Antiochus of Ascalon; and while the latter frequently adapts

Stoic views (sometimes faithfully, sometimes departing in important ways), the view here is distinctly at odds with them. Antiochus is not drawing a contrast between rational and nonrational animals, but *within* rational animals, between the kinds of content the mind and the senses each entertain. Such a division goes against the Stoics' monistic theory of mind, which holds that they are all rational representations of a single mind. But it would be natural view for a Platonist, since it is very close to the distinction between mind and the senses drawn at *Theaetetus* 184–6, at least on the most widely received reading.[52]

The most pressing difficulties for the strict dichotomy reading, though, are philosophical and systematic. First, if nonrational representations do not have any content, it is difficult to see how the Stoics could explain the goal-directed behavior of nonrational animals in the distinctively intentional terms they do, by invoking representations and effort (§1): not only why a spider spins its web or bees build their hive, but why birds fly off at the approach of a predator or how a predator stalks its prey, not to mention the extensive awareness of one's body, capacities, and needs, which the Stoics think newborn animals of all species exhibit (LS 57B–C).[53] If the Stoics thought the content of nonrational representations was so impoverished, moreover, it is surprising that none of their opponents seized on the difficulty. One could conjecture that the Stoics posited primitive versions of rational cognition to do the work, such as "quasi-concepts" and "hormetic markers."[54] But it is not clear what such speculations accomplish. Animal minds would function in closely analogous ways to ours, by categorizing things and applying various notions, to detect whether to go for something or not. The differences
 ↳ seem to be more a matter of degree than of kind. Such a view, then, effectively attributes concepts to animals or, if one prefers, "proto-concepts," despite the difference in terminology. Far from salvaging a strict dichotomy view, this solution abandons it in favor of a graduated approach.

A second problem concerns human development, from infancy to adulthood. On the Stoics' view, we do not start out as rational animals: reason first appears at the age of seven (or possibly 14).[55] It results from the gradual acquisition of concepts—we possess none at birth—and their integration into a system that constitutes reason (LS 39E, 53V). The Stoic account thus presupposes that children acquire and possess concepts *before* they possess reason, something that would be impossible if the strict dichotomy reading were correct. It is difficult to see, moreover, how any concept could arise from nonrational representations in the first place, if the latter did not *already* possess content of a suitable sort, against the conceptualist reading. Otherwise, the Stoics' empiricist account would be magical (§5).

In any event, a key plank in strict dichotomy reading is demonstrably false. *Lekta* are not restricted to rational representations, as it assumes. The Stoics hold that *every causal interaction* involves a *lekton*: one body causes a predicate to hold or be true of another body (LS 55B–D). This applies to animate and inanimate objects equally, and so a fortiori it applies to every representation as well: representations are defined as impressions, the causal effect of objects impinging on our sense organs (§2). Hence whenever a mental representation is produced, whether rational or nonrational, there will be a corresponding *lekton* that is true of the subject, that characterizes *the fully determinate effect* produced by the object. It is not only true that the subject has a representation of some sort or other, or even a representation of a given type, but one that represents specific objects and their features in significant detail. Perceptual representations in particular will be "stamped and sealed" to greater or lesser extents, like imprints in sealing wax, in accordance with the features of the objects that produce them. The *lekton* that comes to be true of a perceiving animal will thus include *embedded within it* the representational content that the object "stamps and seals" on the perceiver's soul—part of the fully determinate effect produced in the perceiver is the exact way things appear to that perceiver. Thus the *lekton* that becomes true of the perceiver will not simply be a generic predicate like

> "... forms a representation"

but rather a predicate of the following sort

> "... forms a representation *that* —"

where the second blank specifies the representation's content, including all the objects and their features, and the ways in which they are related to each other, that the representation is about. To the extent that an animal perceives the world and objects in it as being a certain way—as it surely must, if any explanation of behavior is
p. 390 to be possible in ↳ terms of the animal's representations and efforts, as the Stoics maintain (§1)—the animal will perceive an object as being a certain sort of thing, or as having certain attributes, or as standing in certain relations to other things. In short, it represents certain states of affairs as obtaining, about which it may or may not be correct. But if so, then it has propositional content (expressed by the "that" clause in the schema above). Thus, *every* perceptual representation, whether rational or nonrational, will have a *lekton* corresponding to it that has the representation's content embedded within it, and indeed propositional content, in the full sense of the phrase.

This content is determined naturally and objectively, as the causal effect a perceptible object has on a perceiver. Nothing has been said about which concepts a perceiver might possess, if any, or about "interpreting" representations or "assigning" *lekta* to them. The correlation with *lekta* simply falls out of the Stoics' causal account of representation (§2), when spelled out in terms of their own theory of causation. One might raise a general worry, given **T7–8**, as to how there could be *lekta* independent of a rational animal—some might speculate that they subsist in correspondence with thoughts in the Divine mind or perhaps constitute an independent, Fregean third realm. Our evidence does not say. But it also does not matter. For whatever the underlying metaphysical story is, there will still be *lekta* involved in every causal interaction, and so a fortiori in the production of nonrational representations too. Even if such *lekta* subsist because of the Divine mind, they will be *true of* animals and include the content *of their* representations. The relation to rational representations identified in **T7–8** must therefore be construed differently (§5). Representational content is not restricted to rational beings.

Subjects that possess concepts are of course able to have some representational content that subjects lacking those concepts cannot have. But concepts are not required for there to be *lekta* or representational content in the first place, even in a rational animal: some representational content in rational animals is determined simply by the effect of the perceptual environment on a given perceiver. Hence it is possible that some of these contents might be enjoyed by nonhuman animals as well, not to mention human children. Call this the "INCLUSIVE READING." Lacking concepts and reasoning powers, they may not respond to them in exactly the same ways adult humans will. In particular, they may be incapable of expressing them in language, either because they lack these abilities entirely or have them but do not at that time possess the relevant concepts. But because there are *lekta* corresponding to their representations too, ones that adult humans may share, their representations will still in general be *articulable* at least in principle by us, even if not by the subject having the representation. I may be perfectly correct in saying that the lion sees that there is an antelope just over there and wants to eat it.[56] But I would be right because the lion's representation actually has that content, even though the lion does not possess any conceptual abilities of its own. As on a Russellian account, propositions are not constituted by concepts and so are not dependent on which concepts a given subject possess at a given time (if any), but are constituted instead independently by objects and attributes. Which *lekta* correspond to representations is determined by the causal effect of particular objects on a particular subject.

p. 391 If this is right, then in ascribing representational content to the lion, the Stoics are not merely taking an intentional or instrumentalist "stance," but explaining its behavior in terms of real features of its mental states. Content is a real feature of these states because of objective causal relations that determine which *lekton* becomes true of that perceiver when it forms that representation. Because of this, the content of representations can figure in intentional explanations of human and nonhuman animal behavior quite generally, as the Stoics do in fact seem to hold. The inclusive reading thus avoids the first problem a strict dichotomy reading faces.

5. Concepts

One consequence of the sealing wax analogy, then, is that content and indeed propositional content is an objective feature of perceptual representations, whether rational or nonrational, as a result of causal interaction. But another consequence is how rich in detail such content is, even when it falls short of the standards for secure representations (§3). Such content will be quite "thick" in terms of the information conveyed to the subject about objects in the world. Whether we think of this content as a large set of propositions or as a single massive conjunction, it will typically be so large that as a practical matter no human could fully spell it out in language or reflect on every portion individually on any given occasion. Instead, we experience all of it together as a whole and can, if we wish, yield (*eikein*) to its total content as nonrational animals do and simply follow how it depicts the world.

As rational animals, though, we can also do something nonrational animals cannot, which is to reflect on this content piecemeal, by attending to some of its "thinner" partial contents, assenting to some, rejecting others, and suspending judgment on still others. This discriminative power, which enables us to discern among the partial contents of a representation and respond selectively, is what makes rational behavior possible, because it allows us to assess evidence or goals in a more fine-grained way, and so be accountable for our beliefs and actions in the way we standardly are thought to be.[57] This ability to dissect the thick content of perceptual representations and access the thin contents individually that each contains is not something the perceptual powers can furnish on their own—it is a rational power. But perception provides the material from which rational beings can isolate thin contents, which when grasped on their own are non-perceptual and abstract (LS 39 A4), in short, concepts. The only representations that can have these thinner contents as their *total* content are rational ones, representations which *only* a rational being can have. This gives meaning to the claim in **T7–8** that *lekta* correspond to rational representations: not just the large, complex ones corresponding to perceptual representations, but the simpler, abstract ones corresponding to non-perceptual ones as well. **T7–8** thus circumscribe the set of all *lekta* by reference to the full range of representations rational animals can
p. 392 enjoy, since they alone have representations whose total content might be thin *or* thick. Nonrational ↳ animals are limited to a subset of these: the *lekta* corresponding to their representations are always thick ones.

This picture stands in marked contrast to much of the secondary literature, which makes the mistake of assuming that the total content of a perceptual representation is typically quite thin—e.g., "this is a green book"—a content that can be shared in common by many representations of one or more subjects. If this thin content exhausted the propositional content of a perceptual representation, we would be forced to conjecture on the Stoics' behalf that the same propositional content can be represented "in different ways," where these modes of presentation are *not* to be cashed out in terms of content.[58] Such a maneuver is not only speculative, but wholly unnecessary. People can share the same *partial* contents, which may be quite thin, while their experiences differ radically overall, because the *total* content to which each partial content belongs can be (and often is) exceedingly different for different subjects. But these will still be differences *in content*, and indeed propositional content, that each rational subject can access if they so choose, reflect on, and express in language. Such differences in total content do not prevent representations from being about the same concrete object or offering different views of the same thing, since they can have substantial overlap in their partial contents; secure representations can thus be about the same object as insecure ones, even though the detailed information in their contents will differ in many respects. Whether different subjects could ever have the exact same total content is unclear. But practically speaking, there will be merely partial overlaps, because there always will be differences in subjects' vantage points, abilities, and the experiences that they bring to bear, even when they are affected by objects and surroundings that are as similar as you like.

An *ennoia* or "concept," as I translate the term, is defined as a kind of representation (LS 39F): it is therefore a mental state and so something that exists and has causal powers.[59] More specifically, it is a "stored thought" that we possess, which can be applied to the objects we encounter in order to categorize them, whether

correctly or incorrectly (LS 40S). Such concepts concern general features of things, which can be articulated in definitions (LS 40A3, 32F), framed either as categorical propositions or as universalized conditionals (LS 30I).

Some concepts are formed by performing mental operations on representations, for example, by combining or transposing certain features in their content, magnifying or diminishing others, or constructing their opposites or negations (LS 39D, E3, 60D1). Whether or not these operations are conscious or deliberate, they are clearly contingent on how an individual is thinking on given occasions. In contrast, some concepts are formed naturally, without any deliberate intent or design (*anepitechnêtôs*), simply as a result of what our capacities tend to do on their own in our normal habitat. These are what the Stoics call a "basic grasp" or "basic notion" (*prolêpsis*, LS 40A3, 39D8, E3), such as the notions of goodness and justice (LS 60C–E). Since our minds at birth are like a "blank writing tablet," without any innate or latent concepts, these basic notions are ultimately formed from perceptual experiences: once a sufficient number have been stored in memory and sorted into similar groups, they constitute experience (*empeiria*), which in some way brings into relief, at least in rational
p. 393 beings, shared features in their content (LS ↳ 39E1–3, D1–2; 60D1–3, E3–6). [60] On the present interpretation, the acquisition of concepts should no longer seem like a magical process. It will be a matter of sifting and collating information that is *already present* in the content of our perceptual representations, in the *lekta* corresponding to them as a result of the causal process that produced them. There is no need for bootstrapping. Basic concepts are thin contents abstracted from thick perceptual representations, rather than something merely applied to them.

Because of the natural process by which basic notions are generated, without conscious inference or assistance, the Stoics believe that they provide a fully accurate and reliable representation of features of the world around us, much as secure representations do. For this reason, they think basic notions can also serve as a criterion of truth (LS 40A3). They further believe that our cognitive systems are so providentially designed that certain notions will arise in *every* individual, regardless of experience and circumstance (LS 54C1, K) and so constitute the "common concepts" (*koinai ennoiai*) that serve as a touchstone in argument (LS 48C5, 60G1). On the basis of such concepts, one can subsequently engage in theorizing, through more conscious efforts, to "transition" our focus to incorporeal features of the world, such as the place bodies occupy or the *lekta* utterances signify (LS 39D7, A5; cf. 27E; 33B2). On this basis, even abstract reasoning in math and logic can itself become an object of study.

The concepts subjects possess can affect their perceptual experience too. Acquiring expertise in a certain area or even just extensive experience (such as Tweedledee and Tweedledum's mother has) enables one to reflect on partial contents already present in our perceptual representations, as noted earlier. But because we can also devise new concepts, whose content is not due solely to the processes that produce perceptions—YEAR, for example, or CELLPHONE—we can then apply these concepts to experience and draw conclusions on the basis of informed observations (LS 40S, 53G9). Such contents cannot figure in the representations of nonrational animals and very young children, who are without concepts entirely. But they also will not figure in the experience of adult human beings who have not formed the relevant concept. If Chrysippus were transported suddenly to Athens today, he would have perceptual representations of objects that are in fact cellphones, but he would not recognize them as cellphones. He will, though, once he forms the concept, because of what he can then bring to bear on his experience, and not because objects suddenly affect him differently when they act on his senses. If so, then the conceptualist reading mentioned earlier is also false: although we can apply concepts to our perceptual representations, the content perceptual representations have does not derive entirely from them. Much of it is the natural effect of objects in the world acting on us.[61]

Notes

1. This chapter provides an overview of ideas developed at greater length in my monograph, *The Stoics on Content and Mental Represetation* (in progress). Although most citations are given simply to LS, all translations are my own.

p. 394 2. Long 1996 also uses "representation" as an equivalent for *phantasia*. Michael Frede often uses it (1987*b*; Frede 1994*a*; Frede 1999), though "impression" is his more usual translation, in line with LS.

3. See note 15.

4. On the Stoic *scala naturae*, see Inwood 1985: chapter 2 and 2014: 65–7; Annas 1992: 50–6, cf. 62–4.

5. The Stoics spell out these differences physicalistically, in terms of different states of tension (*tonos*) in the *pneuma*, a blend of fire and air that pervades the entire cosmos (LS 47G–M). See Inwood 1985: chapter 2 and Inwood 2014: 65–7; Annas 1992: 50–6, cf. 62–4.

6. *Hormê* is often misleadingly translated as "impulse," which wrongly suggests something blind and mechanical, whereas in Stoicism it is used only of the goal-directed behavior of animals and humans, and not inanimate objects.

7. Although Origen does not mention the Stoics here by name, in a parallel discussion he clearly alludes to the Stoics (*Orat.* 6.1, 311.16–312.10 = *SVF* 2.989). See also LS 53P.

8. LS 53P, Q; 57A; 62C8–9; 33I–J.

9. Memories, experience, and concepts are all characterized as representations: LS 39D–F, 60D–E; see also Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 7.373; *PH* 2.70. States defined as the assent to a representation include perception (Cicero *Acad.* 1.40, 2.108; Stobaeus 1.349.23–7); belief (LS 41C3; Cicero *TD* 4.15; Stobaeus 2.112.2–4); and effort (see note 6).

10. In a lengthy historical footnote to his famous definition of psychology in terms of intentionality, Brentano (1924: 1.125) enlists many ancient and medieval thinkers as allies, but ironically not the Stoics.

11. Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1073E, 1080F; LS 45A–C, 55B. For Davidson's monism, see Davidson 1980.

12. LS 62C–D, I.

13. See Ierodiakonou, this volume on Stoic corporealism.

14. Sextus *PH* 2.81 (= LS 33P2); *Math.* 7.39, 9.343. The Stoics locate the soul's governing part in the heart: Galen *PHP* 3.1.11, 170.15–16, 3.1.23, 172.17–19 De Lacy.

15. Impression: Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 7.228, 230, 236, 372, 8.400; *PH* 2.70; Diogenes Laertius 7.45, 50; Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1084F; Alexander of Aphrodisias *DA* 68.10–12; Anon. *In Tht.* 11.27–31 Bastianini-Sedley. Impact: LS 40B1, 27E. The sealing wax analogy is not new in Greek philosophy. But the Stoics' use is less like Plato's in *Theaetetus* 191C–195A (cf. Arist. *Mem.* 1, 450a27–b11), with which it is often compared (e.g., Ioppolo 1990, Long 2002), and more like Aristotle's at *DA* 2.12 (424a17–24). Plato offers it as a model of memory, in order to explain false belief, whereas Aristotle, much like the Stoics, uses it to explain perception, with earlier antecedents in Gorgias (*Hel.* 15, 17) and Democritus (DK 68 A135, §51, §52).

16. Chrysippus on Zeno's definition: Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 7.229–30, 373–83, 8.400. See also Cicero *Fat.* 43 (LS 62C9), which shows that Diogenes Laertius 7.50 does not report a wholesale repudiation of the signet ring metaphor, but only an overly literal construal.
On secure representations more generally, see §3. On the translation "secure representation," in place of the more common "cognitive impression," see note 21.

17. Thanks to Stephen Menn for pointing out the allusion to the Polyphemus episode from Homer's *Odyssey* Book 9.

18. E.g., Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 7.388. The Academics presuppose this claim in their attacks (LS 70B4–6), something the Epicureans contest, but importantly not the Stoics.

19. As Sextus plausibly suggests (*Math.* 7.240–1).

p. 395 20. Byrne and Logue 2009 call this “VI v H disjunctivism” because it classes illusory states together with veridical perceptual states, rather than hallucinations, in contrast with “V v IH disjunctivism,” which groups illusory states and hallucinations together (pp. xi–xii). They take Snowden and Langsam to be disjunctivists of the first sort.

21. I prefer this more literal translation to the more common “cognitive impression” (used elsewhere in this handbook), because it retains the connection with the metaphorical gesture that Zeno used in coining the term, thereby suggesting the relevant epistemological sense. The term “cognitive” is much vaguer and less informative: it simply means “connected with knowledge” and contrasts with “affective.” For the translation of *phantasia* as “representation,” see note 2.

22. Although there is disagreement as to whether all secure representations are perceptual—in favor, Striker 1996: 73–6; against, Brennan 1996: 324–5 and Sedley 2002: 150–1—it is generally accepted that the canonical definition was meant to apply only to perceptual representations.

23. Sedley 2002 is an exception to this consensus; see note 26.

24. The precision requirement, (*a*), as formulated here, is compatible with a secure representation representing *more* than just the distinctive features of an object, so long as what it represents always matches exactly the corresponding features of the object, in line with the accuracy requirement, (*b*).

25. Sedley 2002, 139–40 rightly points out the importance of the scope of negation in these texts: (iii) claims it is impossible for the representation “to come from what is *not*,” with narrow scope, rather than wide scope (“to *not* come from what is”).

26. Frede 1987*b*: 164; Frede 1999: 302–3; Annas 1990: 190–1. Sedley 2002 takes the verb to apply both to bodies and states-of-affairs (146–7), but thinks Zeno initially used the preposition *apo* non-causally in these cases.

27. LS 27D–E; 33B, E–G.

28. Frede 1999: 303 brushes this worry aside on the grounds that it would be rash to think a “simple” causal connection was involved. But this does not answer the worry about the ontological status of causes; it just sidesteps it.

29. Sedley argues that condition (ii) requires not only that the representation is accurate, but that it represents the object in a “graphic” and “vivid” way (Sedley 2002: 141, 147–8); he does not clarify, though, whether this is merely a phenomenological matter or instead concerns information contained in the representation’s content. If the latter, I would agree; but if the former, he is vulnerable to an objection that confronts a similar interpretation in Frede 1987b. Frede appeals to the “clarity and distinctness” of impressions (159–62), which, while not explicit in canonical formulations of the definition, is often linked to condition (ii) in the secondary literature. He takes clarity to be an objective rather than subjective feature of representations, yet denies that it is part of the truth conditions of the representation; instead, it is merely “the way” that content is represented on a given occasion (160). Even though he says that such a representation cannot fail to be true, his only explanation concerns how fully detailed it is (161): distinctness, he conjectures (based on texts in Galen, not attributed to the Stoics), consists in the representation’s details “far outrun[ning] the ability of the mind to conceptualize the object” (161–2). Now our texts do claim that secure representations have very rich content, down to the finest details (LS 40E3, 6; 41B)—this is captured by the precision requirement in condition (ii). But it is not clear what epistemological work such detail could do if, as Frede claims, it is not part of the representation’s *content*. Against this, I
p. 396 shall argue in the rest of this chapter that such details *are* part of a ↳ perceptual representation’s content and so constitute information and evidence that would be relevant for knowledge.

30. This holds for all the examples in LSJ under I.B.2: the ships one actually owns (Herodotus 7.144) or property (Isocrates 1.28), the current price of goods (Demosthenes 35.12), or the citizens present (Demosthenes 18.295).

31. The phrase “something that is not present” in (iii′), that is, must be construed *rigidly*, as referring to something that is not in fact present, but might have been, and the question is whether it could produce the same representation if it had been. A nonrigid construal—where the object is not present in the nonactual case *as well as* in the actual one—is not strictly incoherent: something not directly acting on a subject’s senses might produce a representation in indirect ways and even be accurate, like David Lewis’s veridical hallucinations (1986). But such marginal cases are not especially pertinent to the epistemological debate between the Stoics and Academic skeptics. In contrast, existential and veridical readings do not even get this far: whether the corresponding phrases are construed rigidly or non-rigidly, neither yields a reading that is both coherent and well-motivated in the epistemological context.

32. In discussing the Stoics’ position, the Academics sometimes refer to such representations as being *of* or *from* “true” and

"false" objects respectively, that is, from the genuine or real object instead of fake or phony ones, which are not really as they seem: Cicero *Acad.* 2.18, 71, 77, 101, 112; cf. Aristotle *Metaph.* 5.29, 1024b21–24.

33. The three conditions in the definition are clearly meant to apply to representations in the broad sense, since in Chrysippus's narrow sense a representation would already satisfy (i), by stipulation, making the first condition otiose.

34. The negation has wide scope here, as Diogenes correctly reports; Sextus gets it wrong in 40E4. See note 25.

35. For discussion of dull-sightedness (with citations to Plato, Galen, Plutarch, and Eratosthenes), see Rose 2003: 81 and 91, note 57; and chapter 5 as a whole for visual impairments. On double vision: Sextus *Math*. 7.249, together with 192. On the dress controversy, see Rogers 2015.

36. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 7.244–5 (= LS 39G9), 249 (= LS 40E5), 405–6 (= LS 40H2); 8.67.

37. Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.67; PBerol. 16545, l.17 (on which, see Backhouse 2000). David Lewis's "veridical hallucinations" (see note 31) might be another case: they are brought about by the object represented, thus satisfying (i′), but not by its acting directly on the subject's senses—a deviant causal chain is involved—so that even though they are by hypothesis accurate, precise, and true, they will not be so because they are "stamped and sealed" by that object in the relevant way, as (ii′) requires.

38. The Academics argue that this always seems possible, whereas the Stoics deny it. Much depends on what counts as a "distinctive" feature (*idiôma*) and whether they can ever be shared by different objects.

39. Condition (iii′) is less independent than the others: if a representation satisfies it, it must also satisfy (i′), which (iii′) refers back to. But it might be possible for both (i′) and (iii′) to be satisfied without (ii′), if there is no other way to reproduce a certain misrepresentation.

40. See note 46.

41. Inwood 1985: 73–4; Sorabji 1990; Sorabji 1993: 20–8; Labarrière 1993; Brittain 2002: 255–74.

42. LS 27B, D, G; cf. 51F2.

43. Other formulations also suggest dependence or at least supervenience: LS 33B2 (*parhuphistamenon*), 31A7 (*ek toutôn huphistamenôn*), cf. Syrianus *In Metaph.* ↳ 105.25–30 (*parhuphistatai*). Place is said to be similarly related to bodies at Simplicius *In Categ.* 361.10–11 (*parhuphistatai*). It is also unclear whether this is merely a global relation or holds between instances locally, or even just a single case, the Divine mind.

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44. Long 1971: 90; 96–8; Frede 1994*b*: 118. For a critical survey of interpretations, see Schubert 1994: chapter 1.

45. Although many non-perceptual representations will have propositional content, some will not, e.g., attitudes with *non-assertoric* content: desires are said to be directed at predicates contained within propositions (LS 33I); also states involving questions, commands, prayers, exclamations and the like, which have complete *lekta* corresponding to them, but are not expressed by a declarative sentence and do not possess a truth value (Diogenes Laertius 7.66–8; Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 8.71–4). For our purposes this difference will not matter, since they still have the sort of content that can be grasped conceptually and articulated in language. For convenience, I will speak of "propositional content," but do not mean to exclude this broader class.

46. Klein 2016 argues that *non*rational representations also have correctness or accuracy conditions and so have a form of content, though nonconceptual (174, esp. note 73, cf. 167–8, note 58). I think this claim is in a way correct: while these animals lack concepts, their representations nonetheless have content and accuracy conditions. But as I argue further in the chapter, this is precisely because they do have *lekta* corresponding to them.

47. Frede 1987*b*: 153–4; Frede 1986: 108–9; Frede 1994,*a*: 57, 61; 1999, 303; Annas 1992: 75–6; Annas 2012: 114–15; cf. LS 1.240.

48. Stated this baldly, this thesis may seem excessively strong. But it is in fact the received view. See LS 1.240, "So understood, rational impressions of the external world will not imply a theory that the mind receives raw data which it subsequently interprets…. rational impressions themselves represent their objects in ways that presuppose language and concepts." Long 1996: "all their experience is mediated by concepts and language … how things appear to a rational animal will

necessarily depend … on the kind of concepts that it has. Or, to put it in Stoic terms, for every rational representation there is a *lekton*, a 'sayable,' which will articulate the representation in propositional form: *S* is *P*." (273). Frede 1987b: "Sometimes commentators talk as if we applied concepts to objects on the basis of impressions which in themselves are preconceptual. But this cannot be the way the Stoics think of rational impressions … part of what an object does … is that it makes the mind conceptualize the object in a certain way" (154). Frede 1994*a*: "the Stoic view is not that as mature human beings we continue to have the same impressions we had as children, except that we now have learnt to articulate and express what we experience, to say what kind of impression we have. The impression itself has changed. From being the inarticulate representation of some object, it has turned into a representation with an internal articulation which allows it to present to us something as being true or false of something. The same holds for a specific kind of impressions, namely perceptual impressions, impressions which come about by means of the senses" (56–7). Annas 1992: "perception is not a two-stage process: reception of an uninterpreted sensory given *plus* a separable conceptualization of it. There are no perceptions which do not involve conceptualization and thinking: a Kantian kind of thesis" (78). Shields 1993: "*phantasiai* are not inherently true or false, in terms of some pictorial isomorphism with their causally responsible *hupokeimena*, but rather … they inherit their truth evaluability from associated *axiômata*" (346–7; cf. 326, 336, 338), where the relation between *axiômata* and *phantasiai* is many–one (341) and so depends on which *axiôma* is "associated" with a
p. 398 given *phantasia*: a rational being ↳ "correlates" an *axiôma* with the *phantasia* (346) and "uses" the latter to "assert" it (326, 338, 341, esp. note 34), the content of the *phantasia* being the same as the sentence used to express it (337, note 29). Some views of this sort allow rational representations to have nonconceptual aspects as well. Frede maintains, for example, that even though "thought involves the conceptualization of the object … it need not be, and in the case of perception is not, entirely conceptual," because of "the way the constituents of the proposition are represented in thought" and he goes on to say that this thought is "partly nonconceptual" (156). (Long seems to hold a similar view (1996, 275): "nor will the individual content of anyone's representation be fully specifiable in any proposition.") But Frede also insists that the "way" things are represented is *not* part of the content: he argues that while an object "will be represented in such a way that, just on the basis of the impression, we could go on to represent it in terms of a host of concepts" (156; cf. 155), were nonconceptual features included, "there would not be any one definite proposition that forms *the* content of the impression" (154, emphasis mine). Frede takes a representation's truth conditions to be determined instead by the conceptualization of the object (156–7).

49. LS 39C1; Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 7.344–5, 293. Calcidius's report (LS 53G8–9), though not as explicit, might be construed along these lines as well.

50. For Descartes's reliance on Stoic notions, see Elliot Paul, *Clarity First: Rethinking Descartes's Epistemology* (in progress).

51. Galen *Defin. med.* 126 states that they are rational representations (19.381 Kühn), but this obviously does not take us any further.

52. Burnyeat 1976, Frede 1987*a*.

53. For an excellent recent account, with full survey of the literature, see Klein 2016.

54. Brittain 2002: 253–74.

55. Seven: LS 39E4. Fourteen: LS 33H; Stobaeus 1.317.21–4.

56. I am thus in broad agreement with Sorabji 1990 and 1993: 20–8, although I prefer a realist interpretation to the kind of instrumentalism he finds attractive in Dennett.

57. Epictetus very clearly identifies the rational power with "the power of using representations" (*chrêstikê dunamis tais phantasias*) in the opening of his *Discourses* (1.1.4–5, 7, 12), a central theme throughout his work. On this theme, see Dobbin 1998: 73–4. Sometimes Epictetus refines this, saying that while nonrational animals might use representations, humans also "reflect" on them (*parakolouthein*) and "discriminate" them (*diakrinein*, 1.6.12–22, 2.8.6–8, 2.14.15; cf. 1.7.33, 1.20.7, 2.19.6, 4.7.32).

58. As Frede repeatedly conjectures (1987*b*: 153, 155, 156, 160; 1986: 104–5; 1994*a*: 61; 1994*b*: 112; 1999: 304–6). Cf. Long and Sedley 1987 on the "richness and subjectivity" due to "my manner" of perceiving, 1.240.

59. The term *ennoia* is widely translated as "conception," in contrast with *ennoêma*, its intentional object, which is often translated as "concept." These translations are misleading, though, since they presuppose that all Stoics held an idiosyncratic view about the nature of concepts as nonexistent intentional objects (*ennoêmata*), which our sources only

attribute to Zeno and Cleanthes, and not to any Stoics after them. Later Stoics do speak of *ennoiai*, however, which we are said to "store" and "apply" to objects we perceive, much as we talk of "concept possession" and "use." This suggests it is more appropriate to translate *ennoia* as "concept," whether or not later Stoics also insisted on non-existent intentional objects in addition (something for which we have no evidence). In virtually every context their primary focus is explicitly on the *content* of such states when they speak of *ennoiai*, again much like our own usage of "concept," and not intentional objects.

p. 399 60. In this respect, their theory of concept acquisition looks broadly similar to Aristotle's (*APo* 2.19, *Metaph.* 1.1). In both cases, one wishes more had been said about what happens at the critical juncture, when we actually grasp the abstract content, as well as how refinements in our concepts are later produced.

61. I am grateful for questions and criticisms from various audiences who heard versions of this chapter, in part or in whole: §1–§3 at the B Club in Cambridge (2013); §4–§5 at a conference on Stoic metaphysics at Corpus Christi College, Oxford (2015); and in its entirety at the Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas at UNAM, UC Riverside, Stanford University, and the University of Chicago. I would also like to thank the editors as well as James Allen, Brad Inwood, Pavle Stojanovic, and Ricardo Salles for detailed comments, which I found extremely helpful, as well as a valuable intervention by Gabriel Richardson Lear. Since writing this chapter, I have learned of readings of *huparchein* similar to mine in §3 (Togni 2006, Stojanovic 2019), but for reasons of space I cannot take them into account here.

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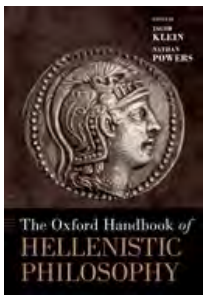
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CHAPTER

17 The Highest Good in Stoicism

Jacob Klein

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the central claims of Stoic ethics: that virtue consists in a demanding form of knowledge amounting to technical expertise in living, and that knowledge of this kind is sufficient for happiness. It pays particular attention to two episodes of controversy in which these claims faced significant criticism, first from Zeno's younger contemporary Aristo and later from Carneades, who developed forceful dialectical objections to the Stoic position based on his own sweeping classification of ethical views. Both episodes of controversy figure centrally in Cicero's presentation of Stoic ethics, which underscores a supposed instability in the Stoic doctrine according to which objectives such as health and wealth, being indifferent, are nonetheless to be pursued as "promoted." The chapter concludes with a brief account of the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis*, and it identifies the philosophical significance of Stoic ethics above all with the Socratic, intellectualist account of human psychology on which it is based.

Keywords: Stoics, virtue, indifferents, happiness, Zeno, Aristo, Carneades, Cicero, oikeiôsis

Subject: Classical Philosophy, Philosophy

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1. Introduction

Zeno of Citium, founder of the Stoic school, arrived in Athens around 310 BCE, over a decade after Aristotle's death and nearly a century after the trial and execution of Socrates. It is unlikely that anyone who remembered Socrates was then alive, but an impressive body of texts, available in the literary and philosophical circles at Athens, dramatized his life and preserved key elements of his thought. This especially included the dialogues of Plato, Xenophon, Aeschines, and Antisthenes, which recalled Socrates's exemplary personal character and represented him as deeply engaged with fundamental questions of ethics. Socrates's legacy was felt as well in contemporary intellectual movements at Athens. Plato's Academy was flourishing under the headship of Polemo, and the followers of Socrates who came to be known as Cynics, though they did not constitute a formal school, were practicing their distinctive and sometimes colorful mode of life in Athens, taking Socrates's own hardiness and personal discipline as a model.[1]

Our sources for early Stoicism suggest that the ethical theory worked out by Zeno was strongly influenced by this Socratic heritage and especially by the Cynics and the Platonic Academy.[2] Zeno studied first with Crates the Cynic and then, perhaps quite extensively, with Polemo, who had succeeded Xenocrates as the Academy's head.[3] A number of the writings ascribed to Zeno have clear ethical import, and some appear to reflect the Socratic and Cynic influence of his philosophical education at Athens. These works include his *Republic*, which seems to have criticized conventional ethical and political thought, perhaps radically, from a largely Cynic point of view, as well as the treatises *On Ethics* and *The Life According to Nature*.[4] Though we can confirm relatively few details of Zeno's own ethical views as distinct from later Stoic developments of them, the outline and general direction of his thought are fairly clear. Following Socrates, he identified virtue with a demanding form of
p. 402 knowledge amounting to technical expertise ↳ in living, and he maintained a strong version of the thesis that the leading virtues are closely interrelated states of character, such that the possession of one requires the possession of all.[5] He moreover held, famously, that nothing is good besides virtue and what participates in virtue, that conditions such as health and wealth make no contribution to the happy life, and that objectives and circumstances such as these are neither good nor bad but indifferent.[6]

Stoic ethics thus appears to have been centered from the beginning on a conception of human excellence as a form of cognition that enables human beings to live their lives well. This recalls the account assumed by the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues and, to a degree, the account that appears in the dialogues of Xenophon and in surviving fragments of Antisthenes. But Zeno also appears to have taken over a fundamental thesis that later sources ascribe to Polemo: that the human end or goal (*telos*) consists in living according to nature.[7] This thesis is largely absent from sources that directly reflect Socratic thought, and it is the distinctive claim with which Stoic ethics came to be identified throughout antiquity. Zeno moreover appears to have incorporated this doctrine within the framework of eudaimonism, arguing that the condition of virtue and the activities that follow on it are the goods in which human flourishing consists, and characterizing the happy life as a harmonious or unobstructed flow of virtuous activity.[8]

Other first-generation members of Zeno's school—who originally were called not "Stoics" but "Zenonians"—authored numerous works on ethical subjects, likely developing Zeno's thought in differing directions, and subsequent heads of the Stoa throughout the school's long history articulated and defended Zeno's ethical claims.[9] Our evidence especially reflects two periods of ethical debate and controversy that unfolded in the course of the Hellenistic era. The first of these occurred in the generation immediately after Zeno, before the consolidation of Stoic orthodoxy under Chrysippus, the school's formidable third head. Notably, Zeno's younger student and associate, Aristo of Chios, broke from Zeno to defend a set of ethical views that adhered even more closely to various Socratic tenets than did Zeno's own doctrines: Aristo argued for an especially austere version of the claim that virtue alone is good, strongly criticizing Zeno's classification of certain indifferent circumstances and objectives distinct from virtue as "promoted" (or "dispromoted"). A second period for which we have evidence of significant controversy dates to the middle of the second century BCE, when two later

heads of the Stoa engaged in running debate with Carneades, the brilliant head of the skeptical Academy. Carneades developed a series of objections to Stoic positions, evidently renewing some of Aristo's criticisms, and he especially challenged the Stoic claim that happiness consists in virtue alone. Many later sources reflect the contours of this debate, in which the Stoics attempted to clarify their ethical doctrines under pressure of criticism from the Academy, and in which they may have revised various earlier commitments, though probably always with a view to preserving the essential tenets set out by Zeno and expounded and clarified by Chrysippus.

The remainder of this chapter discusses these basic elements of Stoic ethics, with some attention to the school's development through time: particularly the early controversy with Aristo and the later debates with
p. 403 the skeptical Academy. It first considers ↳ the early Stoics' understanding of the human *telos* and the account of virtue that satisfies this conception, according to their analysis (§2–§4). It then examines in further detail the Stoic doctrine of indifferents, together with the central criticisms pressed against it by Aristo and Carneades (§5–§6). The final section (§7) turns briefly to some of the later developments in Stoic ethics and to the significance of Stoicism's ethical legacy.

2. The Stoic *telos*

What did Zeno mean by the claim that the human good consists in living according to nature? Polemo, with whom Zeno studied in Athens, wrote a treatise on *The Life According to Nature*, and it is plausible that Zeno's own account of the end was influenced by the teachings of the Platonic Academy.[10] But each of the older Stoic accounts of the *telos* makes reference to a specific conception of the human good that seems to be due to Zeno alone. Zeno defined the end as living in rational agreement (*to homologoumenôs zên*), and similar expressions appear in formulas attributed to Cleanthes and Chrysippus. The term *homologia* ("rational agreement") most frequently refers to agreement in thought or speech between two distinct parties, but it may also refer to agreement with oneself, and so to self-consistency of thought or action. Our sources do not say clearly which of these ideas Zeno originally intended or, supposing he intended both, whether he emphasized one of them in particular.[11] But our fullest report of early Stoic accounts of the *telos*—preserved by the excerpter and biographer Diogenes Laertius—goes well beyond the notion of self-consistency. It summarizes the account of Chrysippus, which seems intended to clarify, and perhaps expand upon, the views of Zeno and Cleanthes:

> **T1** Again, "to live according to virtue" is equivalent to living according to the experience of events which occur by nature, as Chrysippus says in book one of his *On goals*. For our natures are parts of the nature of the whole. Therefore, the goal becomes "to live consistently with nature," i.e., according to one's own nature and that of the whole, doing nothing which is forbidden by the common law, which is right reason, penetrating all things, being the same as Zeus, who is the leader of the administration of things. And this itself is the virtue of the happy man and an unobstructed flow of life, whenever all things are done according to the harmony of the presiding power [*daimôn*] in each of us with the will [*boulêsis*] of the administrator of the whole.[12]

This text is our most detailed and reliable account of the form of life that is best for human beings—the human *telos*—according to the early Stoics. It is remarkable among other things for the connections it draws between so many fundamental Stoic doctrines. Virtue is explained in terms that bring together cognition and action,
p. 404 and nature is presented as something that may be understood on the basis of experience, in a way that ↳ makes possible the rational ordering of action. Conformity to nature is given both a theological and a legislative cast, involving conformity to the will of Zeus and to a rational law present in the cosmos as a whole.

It is especially notable, moreover, that Diogenes's report speaks of agreement between the *daimôn* of the individual and the will (*boulêsis*) of Zeus. By the third century BCE the term *daimôn* had acquired the sense of a

guardian power or presence associated with an individual's lot or destiny and, by extension, with that destiny itself. The older Stoics gave the term a technical significance that traded on these associations. In particular, they characterized the leading part of the rational soul—the rational *hêgemonikon*—as the *daimôn* of the individual and the faculty on which happiness (*eudaimonia*) depends. Because it is the portion of breath-like *pneuma* in which perceptions and thoughts occur and in which impulses originate, the *hêgemonikon* is also the faculty that determines the course of an individual's life, as the association with *daimôn* suggests. This feature of the older Stoic *telos*—perhaps especially as worked out by Chrysippus—suggests that, at least in the first instance, *homologia* was understood as conformity to or agreement with nature, both human and cosmic, and was wholly made to depend on the condition of the soul's leading part, the *daimôn* of Diogenes's report.[13] Because the Stoics regard nature as rationally self-consistent, conformity to nature requires self-consistency of human agents. But it requires a knowledge of nature's ends as well, ends that human beings may come to discern on the basis of experience and seek to realize in their own aims and actions.[14]

The details of Stoic psychology moreover make clear that this condition is a fundamentally cognitive achievement, narrowly dependent on attitudes whose function is to represent the world, and so, ultimately, on the mind's grasp of nature. We can distinguish two broad phases of the process by which the kind of cognitive conformity set out in Chrysippus's account of the *telos* in **T1** is realized by human agents. Both of these are rooted in the Stoics' understanding of the soul as a physical substance facilitating sensation and motion in animate organisms and enabling them to coordinate their activities on the basis of perception. In animals generally the *hêgemonikon* is the seat of sensation (*aisthêsis*) and impulse (*hormê*), and these essential powers distinguish the souls of animals from the mere natures of plants in the Stoic scheme.[15] At birth the human *hêgemonikon* resembles that of other animals, perceptive but not yet rational, but in the normal course of development it becomes the faculty of reason (*logos*), capable of achieving a highly articulate and secure understanding of the world and of structuring motivation and action on that basis. One of our fullest reports—that of the doxographer Aëtius—characterizes this process as follows:

> **T2** When a human being is born, the Stoics say, he has the leading part of his soul like a sheet of paper ready for writing on. On this he inscribes each one of his conceptions (*ennoiôn*). The first method of inscription is through the senses. For by perceiving something, e.g. white, they have a memory of it when it has departed. And when many memories of a similar kind have occurred, we say that he has
> p. 405 experience. For the plurality of similar impressions (*phantasiôn*) ↳ is experience. Some conceptions arise naturally and in the aforesaid ways and undesignedly, others through our own instruction and attention. The latter are called "conceptions" only, the former are called preconceptions (*prolêpseis*) as well. Reason, for which we are called rational, is said to be completed from our preconceptions during our first seven years.[16]

According to this report, the earliest conceptions are acquired—inscribed, in the Stoic metaphor—on the basis of similar sensory impressions that are accumulated and stored through the operation of memory, constituting experience.[17] These initial accretions of impressions, which the Stoics call preconceptions, develop naturally, without attention or instruction, while other conceptions involve higher-order operations of the mind that can occur only once preconceptions are available. The faculty of reason is constituted by a set of these original notions, which amount to a rudimentary form of knowledge of the natural order. Though they are subject to correct articulation and application, preconceptions nonetheless provide a secure basis for further knowledge and partly determine the development of additional conceptions.

A number of sources confirm this account and supply further details. Preconceptions are a subset of conceptions generally. Because their development is guaranteed by rational nature, preconceptions are said to be "criteria of truth," where this evidently means both that their content cannot fail to be true and that other impressions can and ought to be tested against them. Some preconceptions are additionally characterized as common, derived from experience that everyone shares.[18] Acquisition of the conceptions in which reason

consists moreover brings with it further capacities that the Stoics regard as defining features of rational agency. Once acquired, conceptions are the means by which the world is represented, and the impressions that occur in rational agents have, as a result, content that is conceptual, truth-evaluable, and capable of being expressed in language. In virtue of conceptions, rational agents acquire the ability to discriminate among impressions and to give or withhold assent to their truth-evaluable contents.[19] Since the Stoics hold that action (*praxis*) and emotion (*pathos*) wholly depend on judgment and belief, the capacity for assent is for them a crux of agency and a key element in their compatibilist account of responsibility.[20] Assent is up to us, they argue, even when the content of our impressions is not.

The acquisition of conceptions and the accompanying capacities for language and assent mark the normal development of the rational mind, according to the Stoics. But this leaves much room for error in our subsequent cognitions. The Stoics recognize, in addition, a much higher standard of cognitive conformity to nature consisting in a further structure of representations that are sufficiently comprehensive and wholly free from error. This is the condition they call *epistêmê*, and sources characterize it as a system (*sustêma*) of skills or *technai*, where a *technê* is in turn said to be a "systematic collection of cognitions (*katalêpseis*) unified by practice for some goal advantageous in life."[21] *Epistêmê*, which comprises many such *technai*, is itself the skill that enables one to live life as a whole well.

p. 406 The sort of agreement at issue in the Chrysippian account of the human end (*telos*) thus begins as an initial stock of accurate mental representations impressed on the soul's leading part (*hêgemonikon*) by experience, but reason's fullest development—the rational agreement (*homologia*) of the early Stoic telos formulas—depends on a further system of knowledge built up through voluntary assent to impressions with conceptual content.[22] This presupposes much additional experience (including, presumably, sufficient experience of the things that happen by nature, as the Chrysippian formula it **T1** has it) and extensive knowledge across a range of domains. In practice, almost no one achieves this exceedingly demanding condition, which the Stoics ascribe only to the *sophos*, or wise person, who is vanishingly rare. One might therefore suppose that the Stoics take a generally pessimistic view of human nature, since the condition they identify with virtue and living well is so rarely achieved. But given how demanding this condition is, one might also say that the Stoics are optimistic in their insistence that, rare though it is, human beings are capable of achieving it.

3. Virtue and Action

A crucial implication of the account just described is that, for the Stoics, the exercise of reason is directed not merely at internal objectives such as formal consistency or accurate inference, but at a substantive and accurate representation of nature itself. But in addition to the secure and accurate cognition involved in this condition, Chrysippus spoke of action, and of conformity to a rational law running through the whole of nature. One might wonder why a purely cognitive condition, however secure and comprehensive it may be, would necessarily result in correct action. It does not follow simply from the claim that one has knowledge—even ethical knowledge—that one acts correctly, or even that one acts at all.

The link between knowledge and right action is supplied by the Stoics' cognitivist theory of motivation. Here many details of Stoic theory are difficult to recover, and the surviving evidence is the subject of interpretive controversy, but two points are clear: first, that the Stoics suppose that cognitive or belief-like states are in their own right sufficient to bring about action and, second, that intentional action is directly controlled by the beliefs that are its basis. One of the most valuable pieces of evidence for these features of Stoic theory is the following report, preserved by the anthologist Stobaeus:

> **T3** They say that what moves impulse (*hormê*) is nothing other than a motivating representation (*phantasian hormêtikên*) of something as immediately appropriate (*kathêkontos autothen*), while in

> genus impulse is a motion of the soul (*phoran psuchês*) towards something. The *hormê* which occurs in rational creatures is viewed as a species of this, as well as that which occurs in irrational creatures … You would correctly define rational *hormê*, if you said it was a motion of the soul (*phoran psuchês*) toward something in the field of action (*epi ti tôn en tôi prattein*).[23]

p. 407 This highly compressed account distinguishes a class of impressions that are somehow essential to motivation, and it appears to preserve the early Stoics' technical characterization of these as motivating or impulsive impressions (*phantasiai hormêtikai*). It further defines impulse (*hormê*) as something activated or set in motion by assent to impressions of this kind, generating a physical movement within the soul itself. Importantly, the passage suggests that motivating impressions represent some envisioned action as *kathêkon*: that is, as the correct or appropriate action to perform. The term *kathêkon* is a standard designation, appearing in a wide range of Stoic texts, for activities that conform to nature insofar as they are commensurate with or appropriate to an organism's distinctive nature and situation in the world. Accordingly, Stoic sources regularly use it to designate a range of activities that are in fact appropriate or correct.[24] But as Tad Brennan observes, in **T3** the term *kathêkon* evidently appears in an opaque context, characterizing the way in which an action must be represented, whether correctly or not, in order to be capable of activating impulse in the animal's soul.[25] In the rational case, the characterization of an action as *kathêkon* appears to figure in a propositional-like content, and to express the supposition under which an agent acts: namely, that some action in prospect is appropriate to her immediate situation. Whether a resulting action is in fact appropriate in this way—a genuine *kathêkon*—depends on whether the content of the motivating impression that immediately precedes it is accurate or true.[26]

But although it is fairly clear that every intentional action requires a motivating impression of this kind, the nature of impulse (*hormê*) and its role in the generation of action remain obscure in basic respects. In the first place, it is not clear from our sources that every attitude the Stoics characterize as *hormê* is rooted in an occurrent judgment or that it leads immediately to action. The practical judgments that result from assent to motivating impressions are rather said to *activate* impulse, and Stobaeus's source goes on to identify a dispositional form of *hormê* from which situational *hormê* is said to occur.[27] *Hormê* in its dispositional form seems to be an especially deep-seated evaluative belief, or perhaps a structure of beliefs, that is prior in some way to the occurrent motions that follow on assent to motivating impressions. On balance, the evidence suggests an account according to which underlying evaluative judgments, basic dispositions consisting in beliefs about what is good or bad, are activated or set in motion by assent to occurrent judgments that envision some immediately available action as correct.[28] This is the explicit structure of the *pathê*, or emotions, which are said to be forms of *hormê*, and which the Stoics analyze as situational judgments arising from false convictions about what is good or bad.[29] The characterization of *hormê* as an occurrent motion within the soul thus appears to apply more narrowly to activations or expressions of dispositional *hormê*, which consists in an agent's standing (and perhaps unconscious) evaluative beliefs.

However the older Stoics understood the various forms of impulse, their account of motivation is clearly cognitivist in two respects. In the first place, it is clear that belief-like attitudes as the Stoics understand them are not inert. They are capable of motivating action either by bringing it about directly or by bringing about
p. 408 desire-like ↳ attitudes which lead to action in conjunction with prior beliefs.[30] Second, whether or not the Stoics suppose that beliefs are by themselves sufficient for action, it is clearly part of Stoic theory that an agent performs only those actions envisioned in the content of the occurrent practical impressions to which she assents, so that her actions are directly controlled by the judgments that precede them. One consequence of this account is that appropriate actions—*kathêkonta*, in the Stoics' terms—can be generated only by occurrent practical judgments that are true, whereas inappropriate actions—those characterized as *para to kathêkon* (contrary to what is appropriate) and as *hamartêmata* (mistakes)—are always preceded by judgments that are false. In this way inappropriate action supervenes on mistaken belief, so that mistakes always imply cognitive errors according to Stoic theory.

The Stoics moreover distinguish a further correctness condition for actions: an action will be *kathêkon*, or appropriate, just in case it follows on a true practical judgment, even if one does not also possess the demanding form of knowledge (*epistêmê*) in which virtue consists. But an action that is appropriate becomes in addition a right action (*katorthôma*) when it is performed on the basis of knowledge of this kind. Actions of this special sort are grounded in a secure and comprehensive set of accurate representations, and they are constituents of the unobstructed life described by Zeno, inheriting the consistency and stability of the cognitive disposition in which they originate.[31] The Stoics thus distinguish two dimensions along which action may be assessed: a token action is appropriate or inappropriate—a *kathêkon* or *hamartêma*—according to whether it is motivated by a true practical judgment. It is, in addition, a perfect or complete action—a *katorthôma*—if this judgment is made on the basis of a perfected cognitive disposition.

4. Knowledge of Nature

Commentators have sometimes suggested, plausibly, that the Stoic identification of the human *telos* with knowledge of nature is an effort to respond to a problem set by the Socrates of Plato's earlier dialogues: to say what an agent who possesses the virtues must know in order to possess them.[32] But if that is so, what is the knowledge that constitutes virtue knowledge *of*, according to the Stoics? As Chrysippus's *telos*-formula (**T1**) makes clear, the early Stoics identified the knowledge that guides action as knowledge of "what comes about by nature." But what this means in detail, and what the older Stoics in particular took it to mean, is not clarified or elaborated in any source that survives. One uncertain question is whether and to what extent the Stoics identified knowledge of this kind with a theoretical understanding of nature—with an understanding that might enable the wise person, for instance, to act rightly by fitting herself into a larger pattern of events—or whether they thought of it in terms of more familiar-sounding ethical principles, perhaps to the effect that actions of a certain type are characteristically appropriate or inappropriate for creatures of a certain kind.[33]

p. 409 Most of the surviving Stoic characterizations of virtue are at a high level of abstraction, and they offer few details about the nature of practical judgment or the character of practical deliberation as the older Stoics understood them. But it is worth bearing in mind that Stoics both early and late wrote numerous treatises on appropriate action. Such works are attested for each of the founding heads of the Stoic school—for Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus—and also for later figures such as Diogenes, Antipater, and Panaetius. Cicero's dialogue *On duties* (*De officiis*) is explicitly modeled on Panaetius's treatise *On duties* (*Peri kathêkontôn*). We have, as well, fragments of a similar treatise by the late Stoic Hierocles and discussion of specific ethical questions by Musonius Rufus, by Seneca, and by Epictetus.[34] These discussions may well be continuous with those written by the early Stoics, and they tend to suggest that ethical deliberation as the Stoics conceive it proceeds in readily recognizable terms: that one looks to personal relationships and social roles, as well as to one's own nature, and begins from principles that are clearly normative.[35] In each of these later authors, considerations of this kind are employed to support an array of broadly conventional views of sexual morality, business practices, and familial obligations.

As we have seen, the essential point of Zeno's account, clarified and probably expanded by Cleanthes and Chrysippus, is that virtue consists in representational conformity of the soul's leading part to the order of nature, both human and cosmic. The process by which this condition is achieved begins with the acquisition of those conceptions that comprise the faculty of reason and confer the capacities for language and assent. It is completed by the formation of virtue, which consists in secure and comprehensive knowledge of nature and whose acquisition is up to the agent. The Stoic account of motivation further ensures that cognitive conformity of this kind is exhibited in actions that flow directly from the knowledge the agent possesses. Finally, the Stoic understanding of a life lived consistently with nature is integrated within the eudaimonist framework shared by other schools of the Hellenistic period. The early Stoics are explicitly committed to the view that being happy (*to eudaimonein*) is the end to which every aim and action should be referred.[36] Because a condition of

this kind, in harmony with itself and with nature, is free from frustrated desire and from the disturbances of emotion (*pathos*), it amounts to the smooth, unobstructed flow of life that Zeno identified with human well-being. This account is best thought of as a systematic working out of the Socratic suppositions mentioned previously in this chapter: that virtue is knowledge, and that such knowledge is in turn sufficient for right action.

5. Stoic Indifferents

From the beginning Zeno appears to have defended the Socratic claim that virtue is by itself sufficient for happiness and to have characterized conditions and objectives other than virtue as indifferent, as intermediate between good and bad, and as making no difference to the happy life. But he also argued that, within the
p. 410 category of indifferents, ↳ conditions such as health, wealth, or a good reputation are in some way promoted (*proêgmena*) and to be pursued, while other outcomes, the opposites to these, are dispromoted (*apoproêgmena*) and to be avoided.[37] Zeno may have developed this view as a Socratic and Cynic reaction to Polemo (who appears to have treated external objectives as goods to be included in an account of the human *telos*), and the early Stoics evidently employed a number of differing lines of argument to defend it. Some of these seem to have been offered in the spirit of conceptual analysis, closely recalling arguments in Plato's *Euthydemus* and *Meno* to the effect that what is good is unconditionally beneficial, and that nothing but virtue, understood as practical wisdom, benefits unconditionally.[38] Others may have relied on views about the providence of nature, drawing more directly on Stoic theorizing about the rational organization of the cosmos itself.[39]

Zeno's thesis in any case quickly provoked significant criticism and dispute, and debates around the Stoic doctrine played out over some two centuries of the school's subsequent history. Cicero's account of Stoic ethics in particular sets the theory of indifferents in a historic frame, expounding it with reference to controversies that developed at two points during the school's long history.[40] The first such debate occurred during Zeno's lifetime, when Zeno's contemporary and student Aristo broke from Zeno's teachings to develop his own version of Socratic doctrine.[41] Aristo evidently argued for the strict identity of the virtues with one another and for the claim that all circumstances and objectives other than virtue itself are absolutely indifferent. He moreover argued that Zeno's own distinction between what is good and what is promoted differs only verbally from the position of the early Academy, since to regard indifferents as promoted is equivalent to treating them as goods. Aristo thereby put significant pressure on Zeno's attempt to draw intelligible distinctions of value within the class of indifferents themselves.[42]

Cicero represents the dispute between Zeno and Aristo as a major early controversy in Stoic ethics, and he further suggests that Aristo's version of the indifferents doctrine was successfully refuted by Chrysippus, who elaborated and defended Zeno's own position over and against that of Aristo. Chrysippus emphasized that indifferents are the material (*hulê*) of virtue, where this appears to mean both that they are the material with which the virtuous agent must deal in each of her actions, and that distinctions among indifferents are in some way essential to a determination of how one should act.[43] He further characterized indifferents as the principle or starting point (*archê*) of appropriate actions (*kathêkonta*), and he emphasized, perhaps also in response to Aristo, that practical deliberation must in some way take note of the promoted and dispromoted status of certain indifferents.[44] Chrysippus's response to Aristo thus appears to have been consistent with the intellectualist cast of the early Stoic *telos* formulations, emphasizing the epistemic import of the Stoic distinctions. Standard expositions of the doctrine in later sources seem to reflect these elements of Chrysippus's position, treating indifferents as reference points by which appropriate action is ascertained or measured.[45]

In the second century BCE the Stoic doctrine of indifferents came under significant pressure from another direction. Cicero reports that disputes about indifferents came to a head with the brilliant skeptical Academic

p. 411 Carneades, who attacked the Stoic ↳ position, and that of Chrysippus in particular, with arguments constructed on the basis of the Stoics' own premises. Cicero tells us that, for the purpose of arguing with the Stoics, Carneades defended an account of the *telos* that explicitly treated as goods those objectives the Stoics characterize as merely promoted, and he argued that the Stoics were implicitly committed to two distinct ends: virtue and the life according to nature, with the latter consisting in securing and enjoying what is promoted.[46] Cicero, Plutarch, and Alexander of Aphrodisias report some of the premises Carneades employed in framing this dilemma:[47]

> (1) Virtue, understood as wisdom, is the skill or art of living.
>
> (2) Every skill must have some objective distinct from the skill itself.
>
> (3) The objective of the art of living must be some earliest object of natural instinct, viz. pleasure, absence of pain, or some other object of desire.

On the basis of these suppositions Carneades advanced a classification of possible ethical views that put great pressure on the Stoic account of the human *telos*. He argued that if virtue is the art of living, as the Stoics maintain (1), it must be directed like other skills toward the achievement of some distinct objective whose value justifies its practice (2). It therefore has the structure of practices such as medicine or navigation, skills directed at a good that their practitioners may sometimes fail to secure even if they make no mistake in the practice of the skill itself.[48] Since the Stoics regard virtue as a *technê*, and since they treat promoted indifferents as practical objectives at which the art of living aims (3), they ought to regard promoted indifferents as goods. By their own lights, therefore, the Stoics are committed to two ends: both virtuous action and the enjoyment of what accords with nature.[49]

Later Stoics, however, firmly reject this conclusion as Chrysippus had rejected the absolute indifference of Aristo. Though they accept the characterization of virtue as a *technê* that makes essential reference to the value and disvalue of indifferents, they deny that indifferent objectives or conditions constitute an end of action distinct from virtue itself. Alluding to Carneades's charge of two ends, Cicero reports that the Stoics reject comparisons of virtue to medicine or navigation, skills whose practice is justified by the value of the contingent outcomes at which they aim. They compare it instead to skills such as stage-acting or dancing, whose value inheres in the practice of skill itself and is intrinsic to the execution of its methods.[50] Other evidence makes clear that, on the orthodox Stoic view, promoted indifferents contribute nothing to happiness and that the virtuous agent who secures them is no happier than the virtuous agent who does not. Stoic sources further suggest both that there is no reason to regret the loss or unavailability of what is indifferent—whether this results from the pursuit of virtue or from tradeoffs among indifferents themselves—and that there is no reason for elation or satisfaction when one has secured some promoted objective or outcome.[51]

Later heads of the Stoic school evidently endeavored to adhere to the Chrysippian account, but the force of Carneades's criticisms seems to be reflected in versions of the Stoic formulations of the human *telos* attributed
p. 412 to those heads of the Stoic school with ↳ whom Carneades engaged. From the time of Diogenes of Babylon (*c.* 240–152 BCE), Stoic definitions of the end speak not of agreement with nature or of living in accord with the experience and knowledge of nature, but rather of the rational pursuit and management of what accords with nature.[52] According to the formula ascribed to Diogenes, the end is "to be reasonable (*eulogistein*) in the selection and disselection of natural things (*en têi tôn kata phusin*)."[53] Antipater of Tarsus, who succeeded Diogenes as head of the Stoa, held that the end is "to live invariably selecting natural things and rejecting unnatural things."[54] In the case of Antipater, there is a further puzzling locution that seems especially intended as a response to Carneades: in an alternative formulation, Antipater characterized the end merely as doing everything in one's power to secure these natural objectives, whether one secures them or not.[55] Though they were probably intended to be continuous with older Stoic orthodoxy, each of these formulas appears to mark a shift of emphasis away from the epistemic focus of Chrysippus's earlier account.

It is notable that this focus on selection, and the Stoics' renewed concern to clarify the status of indifferents, closely coincide with Carneades's leadership of the skeptical Academy and his well-attested attacks on Stoic doctrine. Much of our evidence for Stoic ethics, particularly as transmitted by Cicero, is colored by the terms in which Carneades himself characterized Stoic theory in the course of these disputes, so that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish Academic characterizations of Stoicism from an account the Stoics themselves would accept. The Carneadean critique of Stoicism, perhaps especially as adopted by the late Academic Antiochus, figures prominently in Cicero's representation of Stoic ethical views in books four and five of his dialogue *On Ends* (*De finibus*). Though the *telos* formulations of Diogenes and Antipater are evidently intended as a reply to Carneades, it is unclear whether they can avoid the implications Carneades associates with the Stoic position: namely, that whatever they may say, the Stoics effectively treat promoted indifferents as rational objectives in their own right, that is, as the effective equivalent of goods, justifying an agent's effort to secure them.[56]

It may be that the Stoics themselves never worked out a fully consistent view in the matter of indifferents.[57] In any case, contemporary commentators have tended to offer interpretations of Stoic ethical theory that resemble either the position of Aristo, who denied that indifferents are of any value whatsoever, or that defended by Carneades, who argued that the enjoyment of promoted indifferents amounts to a rational end distinct from virtue, and hence that promoted indifferents resemble goods in all but name. Some contemporary commentators have suggested that indifferents possess a kind of intrinsic value, distinct somehow from goodness but nonetheless capable of motivating and justifying action in its own right.[58] Interpretations along these lines fit Carneades's own framing of the Stoic view, but they are difficult to reconcile with the Stoics' insistence that the pursuit of indifferents is justified by the value of virtue alone and that there can be no rational basis for regretting a failure to secure them. Other commentators, noting the essential role of indifferents in the discovery or determination of what is appropriate, have emphasized the significance of indifferents as reference points, arguing that the value and disvalue the Stoics ascribe to them function only as
p. 413 epistemic ↳ markers of characteristically appropriate action.[59] This view is more consonant with the Chrysippean position, but it may also appear to resemble the more extreme view of Aristo. It moreover needs to be reconciled with the Stoics' admission that indifferents are capable of stimulating impulse and with the many distinctions they draw in connection with the axiology of indifferents.[60]

6. Grasping the Good

Another prominent Stoic defense of the thesis that virtue alone is good rests on a broader assumption that appears to have been common ground among the main Hellenistic ethical schools. By the time of Cicero, writing in the middle of the first century BCE, debates about the character of the human good and the conditions required for achieving it partly turn—perhaps surprisingly—on questions about the appropriate explanation of the instinctual behaviors observed in non-rational animals and pre-rational human beings. Recalling the ethical debates of the period Alexander of Aphrodisias writes:

> **T4** The views of philosophers on this have differed, but, generally speaking, those who take a position on it hold that the distinguishing feature of the primary object of desire corresponds to the distinguishing feature of the ultimate object of desire.[61]

By "primary object of desire" Alexander appears to mean the earliest object of desire or instinct, implicit in the behavior of children and animals, while "ultimate object of desire" answers to the appropriate or correct object of desire—i.e., the human *telos*. This principle is affirmed throughout Cicero's *De finibus*, where it structures Cicero's account of each of the leading ethical schools.[62] As a general principle it may have originated in the dialectical arguments of Carneades, for like the assumption that every skill must aim at some distinct, justificatory end (see §5), it is systematically incorporated within the division of ethical theories Carneades defended for the sake of argument with the Stoics.[63] But it could hardly have provided a framework for

Carneades's critique, or for Cicero's exposition, without some actual basis in the methods of the leading Hellenistic schools. In fact, Alexander's principle seems intended to capture two distinct assumptions shared by the Stoics, by the Epicureans, and perhaps by the early Academy: first, that the best form of life must be one that is natural for human beings; and second, that pre-rational motivations—as apparent in children and non-rational animals—are an appropriate guide to what is natural.

Yet although Cicero suggests that the Stoics accept these assumptions, his exposition of Stoic theory in *De finibus* 3 also implies that the Stoic theory departs from them:

> **T5** A human being's earliest concern (*prima conciliatio*) is for what is in accordance with nature (*ea quae sunt secundum naturam*). But as soon as one has gained ↳ some understanding, or rather "conception" (what the Stoics call *ennoia*) and sees an order and as it were harmony in the things that one ought to do, one then values that harmony much more highly than those first objects of affection (*illa quae prima dilexerat*). Hence through learning and reason one concludes that this is the place to find the supreme human good, that good which is to be praised and sought on its own account. This good lies in what the Stoics call *homologia*. Let us use the term "consistency" if you approve. Herein lies that good, namely moral action and morality itself, at which everything else ought to be directed.[64]

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Cicero's presentation and analysis of Hellenistic ethics throughout *De finibus* both affirm and depend on the principle reported by Alexander, according to which a correct account of the end must correspond to the earliest objects of impulse. Yet his statement of Stoic theory in **T5** implies and underscores a basic discontinuity between the earliest non-rational impulses and the aims of fully rational motivation.[65] Though impulse is originally directed at the primary things in accordance with nature, these are demoted with the onset of reason, when the aim of motivation is said to shift from objectives to actions themselves, to the order (*ordo*) and harmony (*concordia*) of what must be done (*rerum agendarum*). In the discussion that follows **T5**, the sharpness of this transformation is reinforced with an analogy: though we begin, like other animals, with an attachment to objectives conducive to our physical flourishing, these introduce us in turn to the exercise of wisdom, which we eventually come to esteem more highly, as though we had been introduced to a second, more congenial friend.[66] In the later books of *De finibus*, this supposed shift is offered as a criticism of the Stoic view.[67]

Cicero's account has featured prominently in many attempts to reconstruct the Stoic position. Yet there is some reason to doubt that his exposition represents the older Stoic position fairly. Cicero writes as an Academic skeptic, following in the skeptical and polemical tradition of Arcesilaus and Carneades. Even when he purports to expound Stoic views or puts them, as in *De finibus* 3, in the mouth of a Stoic proponent, he has reasons for representing the Stoics as committed to inconsistent positions. In addition to Cicero's exposition, we possess three additional texts, each clearly rooted in Stoic sources, that also describe the process by which an understanding of the human good is acquired. Each of these sources, which refer to the Stoic theory of natural affiliation (*oikeiôsis*), foregrounds an element Cicero mentions only briefly: an animal's inborn awareness of the constitution that nature has given it.[68] This mode of cognition, characterized as a form of self-perception, enables an animate organism to grasp its correct orientation to the world on the basis of the kind of creature it is.[69] The Stoics argue for the essential role of self-perception in coordinating animal behavior by pointing to the many striking respects in which an animal's behaviors are uniquely suited to its specific makeup and environment.[70]

These considerations suggest an alternative understanding of the Stoic doctrine, one that is at odds with Cicero's representation of the Stoic theory but closely in keeping with the Socratic character of securely Stoic sources. The burden of each ↳ of these accounts is to show that animals accurately perceive the functions for which their individual constitutions have been framed by rational nature, and are motivated to act appropriately on that basis. The late but apparently orthodox Stoic Hierocles, in his treatise *Elements of Ethics*, characterizes self-perception of this kind as the appropriate starting point for a discussion of ethics, and he

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argues at length that the capacity for self-perception is and must be present from birth since it alone can explain the coordination and integration of an animal's behavior with its surroundings.[71] The ethical point of such arguments is evidently to show that something equivalent holds in the rational case, that human beings are likewise able to act appropriately on the basis of a much more developed self-awareness—in particular, on the basis of the self-understanding that is part of *epistêmê*—and moreover that they *ought* to do so.

For both non-rational animals and human beings then, appropriate (*kathêkon*) action is made possible by the capacity for self-perception. In the human case, this capacity is perfected in the cognitive condition the Stoics identify with virtue, which includes a secure understanding of oneself in relation to nature.

Cicero's account also suggests that according to the Stoics a fully articulate conception of goodness is not a conception of the kind that arises naturally and without instruction (a preconception), but one that arises only on the basis of careful observation and reflection. Seneca offers a similar account of the way in which human beings acquire the notion of what is good and honorable (*boni honestique notitia*):

> **T6** Our own view is that the honorable and the good are inferred through observation and comparison of repeated actions; in the judgment of our school, they are understood "by analogy" … Certain acts of generosity or humanity or courage had amazed us. We began to admire them as though they were perfect … These and similar deeds gave us a picture of virtue.[72]

Seneca's account agrees with that of Cicero, indicating that in the Stoics' view, an accurate conception of goodness depends on a sophisticated process of inference and analogy, and so on the higher operations of reason.[73] Since the common notions are preconceptions, and since, according to Aëtius, preconceptions are acquired without attention and learning, these texts may seem to conflict with the claim that the conception of goodness is among the notions that are constitutive of reason.

But there need not be any conflict among these reports. Here it is important to distinguish three distinct conditions that are implicit in our sources: (1) the development of a preconception of goodness itself, (2) the articulation and correct application of this conception to virtue and what participates in virtue, and (3) the realization and expression, in one's own character and activities, of the knowledge (*epistêmê*) that satisfies this conception. Since the preconception of goodness is among the common notions that are essential to the faculty of reason, (1) is indeed a perfectly common condition. Condition (3) on the other hand, is the vanishingly rare condition of the sage, while (2) may perhaps apply to the Stoic sage and practicing Stoic alike. The Stoics do
p. 416 appear to include, ↳ among the preconceptions they recognize, an outline account of goodness itself, and the content of this preconception, in its inarticulate form, seems to involve the conception of goodness as invariably beneficial. In speaking of the detailed knowledge of the good acquired through inference and analogy, Cicero seems to be speaking not of the origin of the preconception of goodness, which is indeed common, but of its full articulation and correct application to virtue and virtuous action, which is not.[74]

Thus the initial content of the preconception of goodness as the Stoics understand it appears to be an outline account, subject to further elaboration and application.[75] Its fullest articulation, on the other hand, is made possible only through the development and exercise of reason; indeed, it partly constitutes the faculty of reason in its fully developed form, achieved only by the sage. These two conceptions of goodness—the inarticulate, outline account that is acquired naturally, and the fully articulate conception, which is correctly applied to virtue alone and may also involve a detailed understanding of nature, appear to answer to the two phases by which rational perfection is achieved: to the acquisition of the preconceptions in which reason consists and to the careful application of these conceptions that leads to *epistêmê*. This understanding of the Stoic view is in keeping with a doctrine ascribed to Chrysippus, according to which virtue itself involves the correct development and application of preconceptions that are naturally acquired.[76]

7. Upshots

By the time of the late Roman Republic, Stoicism offered a systematic and detailed approach to ethics, synthesizing Socratic, Platonic, and probably Aristotelian and Epicurean elements, revised and refined both by disagreements among members of the Stoic school and by long-standing debates with the skeptical Academy. At the heart of the Stoic view was a cognitivist analysis of virtue, a focus on conformity to nature—both human and cosmic—and a position of indifference with respect to objectives and outcomes distinct from virtue and virtuous action. Just as Stoic claims about cognition shaped debates in epistemology, Stoic ethical views, elaborated and defended throughout the Hellenistic period, frequently supplied a framework for discussion and set the terms for the ethical debates of later antiquity, when handbooks or digests of Stoic ethical doctrine, along with systematic Stoic treatises on conduct, achieved a wide circulation and enjoyed a particular prominence among the educated elite at Alexandria and Rome. In considering Stoic ethics, it is helpful to keep this long and complex history in mind and to recall that the best view we are now able to recover of Stoic ethical thought is a composite and course-grained picture, one based on highly incomplete and frequently partial sources.

Thanks largely to the industry and prestige of Cicero, whose Latin dialogues dealing with Greek philosophy were widely read and admired, a core of Stoic ethical doctrine survived throughout the Middle Ages and passed
p. 417 finally into the Renaissance and ↳ modern eras, where it found renewed expression.[77] The Stoics' idealization of freedom from non-rational desire, of virtue as the only good, and of motivation on the basis of reason aligns them in basic respects with Kant, as against thinkers such as Hume, Rousseau, and Mill. Each of the Stoics' distinctive ethical doctrines rests ultimately on an analysis of the human soul as a unified faculty whose essential functions consist in cognitive conformity to nature and in appropriate action on that basis. This intellectualist understanding, which looks back to the Socratic model, was long regarded in antiquity as a fundamental alternative to the psychological theories of Plato and Aristotle, both of which assert the existence of an ineliminable non-rational element within the human soul. The Stoics' consistent presentation of an alternative understanding of human nature and the striking conclusions they draw from it have ensured the enduring interest of their ethical theory.[78]

Notes

1. On the philosophical situation in Athens in Zeno's day, see esp. Sedley 1980, Long 1986: chapter 1 and chapter 4, Long 2018.

2. Some of the older Stoics were evidently willing to call themselves Socratics (Philodemus *De Stoicis* 13.3–4), and Zeno himself appears to have identified closely with the figure of Socrates, perhaps especially as represented by the Cynic tradition. On this, see esp. Long 1988: 160-64.

3. Zeno is also said to have studied with Stilpo the Megarian and Diodorus Cronos (DL 7.2 and 7.25).

4. Schofield 1991 and Vogt 2008 are valuable discussions of Zeno's *Republic*.

5. Plutarch *Stoic. rep.* 7 1034c–d. On Zeno's account of virtue and the interrelation of the virtues, see Schofield 1984 and 2013.

6. DL 7.101–3 (= LS 58A), Stobaeus *Ecl*. 2.84–5 (= LS 58E).

7. Clement of Alexandria reports that Polemo wrote a work *On the Life According to Nature* (*Strom.* 7.6.32.9). Cicero says that he identified the highest good with living in accordance with nature (*Fin*. 4.14) and represents Zeno has having taken over this account (*Fin*. 4.14, 4.51–5). Cf. Cicero *Acad*. 1.35, and see also note 11.

8. Here and elsewhere, I borrow Stephen Menn's term "unobstructed" to translate Zeno's *euroia biou*, more literally a *smooth*

flow of life (Menn 1995: 3). Zeno may—but need not—have taken the eudaimonist thesis from Aristotle. The extent to which the early Stoics engaged with Aristotle is unclear. Eudaimonism is present in Socratic thought as represented by Plato, and (as Nate Powers reminds me) it is presumably also the framework within which Polemo advanced his own account of the human good as living according to nature. On Aristotle and the Stoics, see esp. Bénatouïl 2016. On Chrysippus's relation to Aristotle, see Irwin, this volume.

9. On the school's history, see esp. Sedley 2003.

10. On Zeno's relation to Polemo, see esp. Dillon 2003: 159–77 and Long 2018.

11. Cicero (*Fin*. 3.21, 3.31) translates *homologia* as *convenientia* (cf. *Fin*. 4.14-15). Emphasizing the first definition, commentators have sometimes compared the Stoic view to Kantian conceptions of practical reason as formal consistency, but DL 7.87-9 strongly suggests that from the beginning Zeno characterized the end as agreement with nature in particular, and Cicero appears to confirm this. Helpful discussions of Stoic formulations of the end ↳ include Long 1971, Rist 1977, Inwood 1985, Annas 1993, Forschner 1981, Frede 1999, Inwood and Donini 1999, Brennan 2005, Cooper 2012, Forschner 2018, and Gill 2022.

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12. DL 7.87–8, trans. after Inwood and Gerson.

13. On this account *eudaimonia* is achieved through the perfection of the leading part of the soul—the *hêgmonikon* that is identified as an individual's *daimôn*—bringing it into harmony with the rational purpose of Zeus. Cf. Galen *PHP* 5.2.49–5.3.1 = *SVF* 2.841 = LS 53V, Seneca *Ep*. 120.14. On Stoic uses of the term *daimôn*, see Algra 2011.

14. Some of Cicero's characterizations especially reflect this emphasis on knowledge of nature's purposes. See esp. *Fin*. 3.31 and 4.14.

15. Hierocles *El. Eth*. (col. 4.20) characterizes the soul as a perceptive faculty (*dunamis aisthêtikê*). On perception and impulse as essential characteristics of animate organisms, see Hierocles *El. Eth*. col. 1.31–3 and Philo *Leg*. 2.22–3 (= LS 47P = *SVF* 2.458), *Leg*. 1.30 (= LS 53P = *SVF* 2.88). See also Caston, this volume and Tsouni, this volume.

16. Aëtius 4.2.1–4 (= LS 39E), trans. after Long and Sedley. On Aëtius's status as a source, see White, this volume.

17. "Impression" (*phantasia*) is a Stoic term covering all of the mind's representational states. It applies equally to appearances that are the effects of external objects impinging on the sense organs and to representations resulting from operations of the mind itself. See further Caston, this volume.

18. The content of common conceptions evidently answers to common objects of perception—i.e., to things that are, according to the Stoics, universal elements of human experience. Some preconceptions, on the other hand, are not clearly universal, and their acquisition may depend on the specific character of experience. See further Brittain 2005, 168–85; Fine 2013, 257–96. See also Powers, this volume.

19. According to Aëtius (**T2**), reason is completed (*sumplêrousthai*) at the age of seven years. Iamblichus, on the other hand, says that "reason is gathered together (*sunathroizesthai*) from perceptions and impressions at about the age of fourteen" (Stobaeus *Ecl*. 1.317.22 = *SVF* 1.149, 2.835, trans. Frede). Diogenes Laertius (DL 7.55 = LS 33H) seems to suggest that thought (*dianoia*) is perfected (*teleioutai*) at the age of 14. The differing numbers perhaps answer to distinct critical phases in the development of reason as the Stoics understand it.

20. See Meyer, this volume.

21. LS 42A. See further Hankinson 2003: 63. One might also translate *technê* by "art" or "expertise." In characterizing *epistêmê* as the art or expertise of living (*technê tou biou*), the Stoics seem to have been concerned, first and foremost, to compare the work of reason to that of a craftsman who brings about his product with an order and regularity that are invariable. Thus, the work (*ergon*) of the Stoic sage is "to be unvarying in his right actions" (*en tois katorthômasi diomalizein*, Sextus *M* 11.207–208). These uniformly correct actions are the product or work (*ergon*) of *epistêmê*, constituting Zeno's unobstructed flow of life. See further Sextus *M*. 11.204–8. I thank Nate Powers for this reference and for discussion of this point.

22. It thus contrasts with modern conceptions that take rationality to be a matter of formal consistency or coherence. See further Frede 1994. For a recent analysis of internalist conceptions of reason, both practical and theoretical, see Wedgewood 2017.

23. Stobaeus *Ecl.* 2.86–7 (Wachsmuth). The translation is after Pomeroy but adopts Inwood and Gerson's rendering of *kathêkontos autothen* as "immediately appropriate." Here and elsewhere, I follow the emendations to Wachsmuth's text adopted by Pomeroy.

p. 419 24. Stoic treatises on appropriate action were regularly titled *Peri kathêkontôn* (i.e., *On Appropriate Actions*). See also Tsouni, this volume.

25. Here and elsewhere, I am very much indebted to Tad Brennan's analysis, both for my understanding of the Stoic view and for some of the terms in which I have characterized it. As Brennan observes, the Stoics employ the term *kathêkon* to indicate something like the guise under which an agent most immediately acts. This is clear from **T3**, from the Stoic analysis of the *pathê*, and from various characterizations of Stoic impulse found in Cicero, Seneca, and Epictetus (Brennan, unpublished). Although the term's extension certainly includes obligations that are plausibly characterized as duties, it is clear from the Stoics' systematic use of the term to convey the content of any and all motivating impressions that its sense is not *equivalent* to that of "duty": "Since, within Stoic moral psychology, every action is conceived of as [*kathêkon*], and it is not possible to perform actions without that thought, it follows that acting because one conceives one's action as [*kathêkon*] is not the same as acting from duty" (Brennan 2005: 175). An important recent study of the term's appropriation and theoretical use by the Stoics is Visnjic 2021. Visnjic unfortunately does not address this argument of Brennan's.

26. This is evidently intended as a characterization of rational and non-rational impressions alike, raising difficult questions about the kind of content the Stoics associate with the attitudes of animals and pre-rational humans. For contrasting views, compare Brittain 2002 with Caston, this volume.

27. The older Stoics recognize a complex taxonomy of *hormê*, and some sources (Stobaeus *Ecl*. 2.87–8, Plutarch *Stoic. rep*. 1057b) speak in particular of practical impulse (*hormê praktikê*), which seems to imply a distinction with impulses that are not practical or which do not immediately trigger a motion within the soul. On this point, see Long 1977 and Stevens 2000.

28. This is clearly the structure of the passions (on which see esp. Graver 2007), which are said to be forms of impulse. In my view, it is also the structure of Stoic impulse generally (Klein 2021).

29. See Kamtekar, this volume.

30. The only element of Stoic psychology that could possibly be construed as a desire-like attitude is *hormê* itself, which is sometimes characterized as assent—thus resembling a judgment or belief—and sometimes as a motion within the soul directed outward from its leading part. The latter characterization might seem to suggest an attitude with world-to-mind "direction of fit."

31. See esp. Stobaeus *Ecl*. 5.906.18–5.907.5 (= LS 59I).

32. Though the Stoics count the knowledge they identify with virtue as good, they do not identify its content with knowledge *of* what is good, but with knowledge of nature. This marks an important difference between the Stoics and Socrates as represented in some of Plato's dialogues. On this point, see esp. Menn 1995.

33. I emphasize the latter approach later in this chapter, but the former is perhaps suggested by Cicero (e.g., at *Fin*. 3.31 and 4.14) and by a formulation of the end attributed to Posidonius (see note 51). Cf. also Powers, this volume on the preconception "god."

34. For this material, see Inwood 2022.

35. On this point, see esp. Brennan 2005: chapter 11 to chapter 13.

36. Stobaeus *Ecl*. 2.77.16–27 (= LS 63A).

37. Promoted indifferents correspond roughly (not exactly) to the set of things Aristotle characterizes as external goods (*ta ektos agatha*). See *EN* 1099a ff., 1098b 26.

p. 420 38. See *Euthydemus* 281b–e, *Meno* 87e6–88d3, and the discussions by Long 1996 and McCabe 2007. Sextus *M* 11.22 reports that the Stoics, "relying on the common conceptions (*ennoiai koinai*), define the good" as "benefit (*ôpheleia*) or not other than benefit" (trans. Brittain). Among the preconceptions Chrysippus appears to have regarded as common, hence as

criteria of truth, is a preconception of the good itself. Perhaps following Zeno, Chrysippus appears to have argued that only virtue and its activities satisfy this conception and alone are goods. See also §6.

39. For this line of argument, see Cooper 1996. At *Fin*. 3.45–54 Cicero deploys an array of analogies (some of which he attributes to Zeno) to illustrate the Stoic distinction between goods and indifferents. Some of these analogies are not obviously consistent with one another, and together they seem to obscure the Stoic doctrine as much as clarify it. Cf. Seneca *Ep*. 92.5–18.

40. Writing as a Platonist, Plutarch says that Zeno was compared to a merchant with wine gone sour, who could sell it neither as wine nor as vinegar. Just so, concludes Plutarch, "there is no disposing of Zeno's 'promoted' either as good or as indifferent" (*Stoic. rep.* 1047e., trans. Cherniss). Cicero's characterization in *De finibus* 4 and 5 emphasizes a similar supposed instability in the doctrine and represents the Stoics as equivocating between different formulations of it. See esp. *Fin*. 4.19–23.

41. Aristo achieved a high philosophical reputation in his own right, and his doctrines appear to have been regarded as an alternative form of Stoicism throughout much of antiquity. He taught in the Cynosarges, a gymnasium and sacred grove outside the walls of Athens (DL 7.2.151). Seneca reports that in ethics he opposed the use of specific precepts (*praecepta*) and maintained that one should instead be guided by a fundamental understanding of the highest good (*Ep*. 94.2–3). Aristo rejected the study of dialectic and physics (DL 7.160) and defended his own version of the indifferents doctrine (DL 7.37; Sextus *M* 2.64–7 = LS 58F). See further Ioppolo 1980, Schofield 1984, Porter 1996, and Marrin 2020. See also Long, this volume. Ioppolo (1980: 158) suggests that Aristo himself may have coined the term "indifferent" (*adiaphoron*).

42. Sextus *M* 11.64–7 (= LS 58F).

43. See esp. Plutarch *Comm. not*. 1069e. Cicero too represents indifferents as essential to practical deliberation. See *Fin*. 3.12, 3.58, 3.60.

44. Appropriate actions are also said to be measured (*parametreisthai*, *metiri*) by indifferents (Stobaeus *Ecl.* 2.86, Plutarch *Stoic. rep*. 1042d, Cicero *Fin.* 60–1); and Plutarch speaks of the Stoics as doing everything at the command (*apo prostagmatos*) of indifferents (*Comm. not*. 1064c; cf. *Stoic. rep*. 1042e).

45. A passage from Epictetus confirms that Chrysippus himself spoke of selection as the appropriate attitude to take with respect to indifferents (*Diss*. 2.6.9 = LS 58J).

46. See Cicero *Acad*. 2.131; *Tusc*. 5.84–5; *Fin*. 4.15, 5.20.

47. Cicero *Fin*. 5.16–23, Plutarch *Comm. not*. 1070f–1072f., Alexander of Aphrodisias *Mant*. 159.15–168 Bruns.

48. That is, Carneades offers as examples of virtue *technai* whose ends (a) partly justify the exercise of the skill and (b) are distinct in the strong sense that one may fail achieve the end without any failure in the practice of the skill itself. See Cicero *Fin*. 5.16, Alexander of Aphrodisias *Mant*. 164.35–165.4 Bruns.

49. On Carneades's classification of ethical theories and the polemical use to which he put it, see further Wynne, this volume.

50. Cicero *Fin*. 3.24.

p. 421 51. The Stoics' clear refusal to concede that positive or negative affective responses (*pathê*) are either motivated or justified by the selective value (or disvalue) of indifferents stands in the way of interpretations according to which actions (*praxeis*) are so motivated and justified, particularly in view of the Stoic claim that action and emotion equally originate in evaluative judgments about what is appropriate (*kathêkon*).

52. A formula attributed to Posidonius (*c*. 135-51 BCE) seems closer in spirit to the Chrysippian view. Posidonius held that the end is "living as student of the truth and order of the whole and helping to promote this as far as possible" (Clement *Strom*. 2.21.129.4–5 = LS 63J, trans. Long and Sedley). For the dates of leading Stoics, see Dorandi 1999: 37–43.

53. Stobaeus *Ecl*. 2.76.9–11 = LS58K, trans. Inwood and Gerson.

54. Stobaeus *Ecl*. 2.76.12–13 = LS 58K, trans. Inwood and Gerson.

55. Stobaeus *Ecl*. 2.76.15–19 = LS 58K.

56. I borrow the useful term “rational objective” from Irwin 1986.

57. Two small items of evidence may suggest later, substantive revisions to the original Stoic doctrine. Seneca (*Ep*. 92.5) seems to suggest that Antipater in particular made a concession of some kind in connection with the value of indifferents, and the epitome preserved by Stobaeus records that Antipater introduced the term *axia eklektikê*—selective value—to characterize the status the Stoics ascribe to some of them (*Ecl*. 2.83.15–2.84). Cf. Cicero *Fin*. 3.57.

58. Irwin 1986, Long and Sedley 1987, and Kamtekar (this volume) treat the value of indifferents as intrinsic. See Lesses 1989 for an instrumental account of their value.

59. I wholly agree with Michael Frede’s judgment that “the Stoic position is that the concern for things which merely have value is entirely derivative on the concern for the good” (Frede 1999: 91). Cooper 1996 and Brennan 2005 suggestively characterize the value of indifferents as “pursuit-value” and “planning-value,” respectively. For an epistemic interpretation of the Stoic doctrine, see Brennan 2014, Klein 2015, Baltzly, Durand, and Shogry 2023, Doyle Sánchez 2024.

60. For the claim that indifferents are capable of activating impulse, see DL 7.104–5 (= LS 58B) and Stobaeus *Ecl*. 2.82.19–25 (= LS 58C). For additional distinctions drawn within the category of indifferents, see Stobaeus *Ecl.* 2.80.14–2.83.13, DL 7.106–7, and Cicero *Fin*. 3.56–7. However the Stoic doctrine is understood, it should be emphasized that the recognition of an indifferent objective as promoted or dispromoted is not by itself sufficient to generate rational impulse in its own right, but does so by informing the *kathêkon* judgments that underlie all deliberate action, as the evidence discussed in §3 makes clear.

61. Alexander *Mant*. 150.27-32 Bruns., trans. Inwood.

62. It is a remarkable feature of Cicero’s *De finibus* that each of the ethical theories expounded there—Epicurean, Stoic, and Antiochean—begins with a characterization of the earliest instincts in non-rational animals and pre-rational humans and proceeds to conclusions about the character of the human good. Summarizing this method, Cicero says: “The origin of the whole dispute about the highest goods and evils, and the question of what among them is ultimate and final, is to be found by asking what the basic natural attachments are. Discover these, and you have the source from which the rest of the debate about the supreme good and evil can be traced” (*Fin*. 3.17, trans. Woolf).

63. See *Fin*. 5.19. See also Wynne, this volume.

64. *Fin*. 3.21, trans. Woolf.

65. In setting alleged Stoic commitments against one another, Cicero’s procedure is consistent with the methods of the New Academy. See Allen and Bett, this volume.

66. *Fin.* 3.23 (*SVF* 3.186).

p. 422 67. See esp. *Fin*. 4.26.

68. On the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis*, see Pembroke 1971, Striker 1983, Long 1993, and Klein 2016.

69. This awareness is prior to, and therefore underlies, both the animal’s attachment to its own constitution and its ability to act in ways that are kind-relative, commensurate with the constitution it perceives itself to have. See further Klein 2016: 163–70.

70. Stoic sources speak both of self-perception (*aisthêsis heautou*) and (adopting Boys-Stones’s translation) co-perception (*sunaisthêsis*). See further Boys-Stones 2007: 19–124 at 85.

71. On this aspect of the Stoic doctrine, see esp. Long 1993.

72. *Ep*. 120, 4–8, trans. Graver and Long.

73. Cicero (*Off*. 1.46) speaks similarly of images or likenesses of virtue (*simulacra virtutis*).

74. Sandbach 1930 denies that the older Stoics “spoke of a preconception of anything but the gods,” and he explicitly interprets references to a preconception of goodness in Diogenes and Plutarch in the light of Seneca’s and Cicero’s remarks (47). On the other hand, Frede 1994 seems to class the conception of the good with other *prolêpseis* that are naturally acquired, and so which characterize the faculty of reason itself (52).

75. See Sellars, this volume.

76. That is, all humans have a preconception of what is good. But (1) it is not necessarily an articulate conception, (2) it may be misapplied, and (3) possessing and applying it correctly would appear to be distinct from having the virtue that satisfies it. It possible, though not certain, that the Stoics regarded the conditions for correctly applying the preconception of goodness as among the conditions of its articulation, so that (1) requires (2).

77. Examples abound. Stoic ethical doctrines figure explicitly in the thought of Justus Lipsius and Hugo Grotius and to a lesser degree in that of humanists like Montaigne, whose essays regularly advert to the claims of Stoic ethics. Descartes's letters to Princess Elisabeth reveal a close familiarity with Stoicism, as does the work of Spinoza and Pascal. The ethical naturalism of Joseph Butler clearly builds on Stoic views, and Adam Smith's *Theory of Human Sentiments* devotes more space to Stoicism than to any other ancient ethical theory. It is likely that Stoic ethical doctrines, particularly as expressed in Cicero's *De officiis*, substantially influenced Kant's own ethical outlook. Stoic themes appear in the ethics of F.H. Bradley and T.H. Green and recur in the work of Nietzsche. For an excellent discussion of Kant's use of Cicero's *De officiis*, see Hahmann and Vazquez 2022. See further Sellars, this volume.

78. I thank Nate Powers for discussion and numerous helpful comments.

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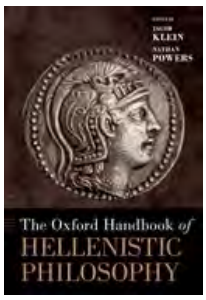
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CHAPTER

18 Stoic Emotion: The Why and the How of Eliminating All Emotions

Rachana Kamtekar Author Notes

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the Stoic injunction to eradicate, rather than moderate, emotions. Pursuing the question of why the Stoics maintain such an apparently extreme position, the chapter first investigates the Stoic claim that all emotions involve judgments of value that are contrary to reason. It then considers the attitude with which the Stoics say we should replace emotions in order to make moral progress, namely "impulse with reservation." The final section of the chapter examines one surprising strategy for eliminating emotions recommended by Epictetus: the use of one emotion to remove another, in particular, the replacement of anger by pity.

Keywords: emotions, Stoics, value, moral progress, impulse, Epictetus

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Stoic ethics is probably best known for its injunction to eradicate, rather than moderate, the emotions—not only negatively valenced ones like anger and fear, but all of them, including positively valenced ones like pleasure and love. Pursuing the question of why the Stoics maintain such an extreme position about what seem to be basic human responses to events takes us deep into Stoic moral psychology and value theory. Below, §1 investigates the Stoic claim that all emotions involve judgments of value that are contrary to reason. §2 explores the attitude with which the Stoics say we should replace emotions in order to make moral progress, namely "impulse with reservation." Finally, §3 examines one surprising strategy for eliminating emotions given the goal of eliminating them all, namely, the use of one emotion to remove another; our example will concern the replacement of anger by pity.

1. What Are Emotions and What Is Wrong with Them?

Let us begin with representative Stoic definitions of emotion and of the four genera of the emotions: appetite, fear, pain and pleasure (my translation here and below unless noted otherwise).

> **T1** An emotion (*pathos*) is an irrational (*alogos*) and unnatural (*para phusin*) movement of the soul, or
> p. 427 an overreaching impulse (*hormê pleonazousa*) ... A ↳ pain (*lupê*) is an irrational contraction or a fresh opinion of a presence of an evil, at which they think one ought to contract (*dein sustellesthai*). A fear is an irrational aversion (*ekklisis*) or flight from a prospective danger. An appetite is an irrational desire (*orexis*) or pursuit of a prospective good. A pleasure is an irrational elation (*eparsis*) or a fresh opinion of a presence of a good, at which they think one ought to be elated.
>
> (Andronicus *Peri Pathôn* 1 = *SVF* 3.391 = LS 65B)

> **T2** They say an emotion is an impulse that overreaches and is disobedient to choosing reason (*hairounti logô[i]*) or a movement of the soul that is unnatural (and all the emotions belong to the leading part of the soul) ... [Of the four generic emotions] appetite and fear take the lead, in relation to the apparent good and the apparent evil. Pleasure and pain arise from these, pleasure whenever we get the things we had an appetite for or escape the things we feared, pain whenever we do not get the things we had an appetite for or we fall into the things we feared ...
>
> (Arius Didymus *Epitome of Stoic Ethics* 10 = W 2.88, 8 ff. = *SVF* 3.378 = LS 65A)

> They say an appetite is a desire disobedient to reason, and its cause is believing that a good is approaching because of whose presence we will come out well, the belief itself having something stimulative (*kinêtikon*, lit., such as to cause movement) in a disorderly way (*ataktôs*). A fear is an aversion disobedient to reason, and its cause is believing that an evil is approaching, the belief having something stimulative and fresh of its [i.e., the evil's] really being to-be-fled (*tês doxês to kinêtikon kai prosphaton echousês tou ontôs auto pheukton einai*). A pain is a contraction of the soul disobedient to reason, and its cause is believing that a fresh evil is present at which it is appropriate [to be contracted].
>
> (Arius Didymus 10b = W 2.90, 7 ff. = *SVF* 3.394)

T1 and **T2** highlight three ingredients in the Stoic account of emotion:

(1) an evaluative opinion or belief that is the cause of the emotion (more on this below),[1]

(2) a description of the physiological feel of the emotion (sometimes called its "phenomenology"), and

(3) a connection to some sort of movement.

Modern scholars have tended to emphasize the connection between (1) and (3) in order to reconstruct the Stoics' cognitive theory of motivation.[2] This is because, in addition to the greater relevance to ethics of the evaluative opinion (1) and the impulse to act (3), the phenomenology of emotions (2) can survive the elimination of (1) and (3). On the Stoic account, take away the belief that causes an emotion and what is left is not an emotion. For example, if, on the occasion of my loss, I do not judge that an evil is present to me but I do I
p. 428 feel a gnawing in the chest, the Stoics will say that it is not pain that I feel. ↳ (Insofar as *we* might think that this is a case of pain, and that we can feel pain against our better judgment or involuntarily, the Stoic theory is revisionist.). Feelings that are not emotions include "pre-emotions" (*propatheiai*), which do not involve beliefs; e.g., in a storm at sea, the sage (the wise person who is the Stoic ideal) may blanch but without experiencing fear, for she does not believe that death at sea is bad or that it is appropriate to contract. Feelings that survive

the elimination of emotions with (1) and (3) replaced by their good counterparts are the "good feelings" (*eupatheiai*, *constantiae*). Instead of pleasure, the sage feels joy at the presence of virtue; instead of fear, caution at the prospect of vice; and instead of desire, wish at the prospect of virtue. There is no good feeling corresponding to pain, because vice is not present to the sage.

However, we should not be too quick to conclude from the presence of feelings despite the absence of emotions that how emotions feel is unimportant. Even if the feel of an emotion is not practically or motivationally important, their feel is often what allows fine-grained distinction among the emotions.

> **T3** Vexation (*achthos*) is pain that weighs us down, annoyance (*enochlêsis*), pain that confines and constrains us; distress (*ania*), pain that remains or extends from calculation; sorrow (*odunê*), laborious pain; consternation (*sungchusis*), irrational grief that wears us down and prevents us from taking a synoptic view of the situation.
>
> (*SVF* 3.412 = DL 7.112)[3]

Although all the emotions are characterized by features (1), (2), and (3), the answer to our question, "why eliminate the emotions?" is given by feature (1) in **T1** and **T2**, the belief that causes an emotion: the emotions are irrational or "disobedient to reason." For according to the Stoics, the goal of life is to live in agreement with reason, or nature, where nature is a principle of rational order and harmony (Stobaeus W 2.75, 11 ff = LS 63B). But this raises the question: why do the Stoics deem all emotions irrational or disobedient to reason? Didn't Plato and Aristotle show how at least some emotions could "listen to reason" and be trained to support a virtuous and happy life?

To answer this question, we need to look more closely at the belief that causes the emotion. The belief seems to come in two parts: (a) a good or evil is present (pleasure, pain) or in prospect (appetite, fear) and (b) being elevated or contracting, or pursuing or avoiding, are appropriate responses to (a).[4] From (b) we can see that an emotion is a type of impulse (*hormê*), a practical (*praktikê*) movement of the soul. The impulses of rational beings generally require assent to the proposition corresponding to an impulsive presentation (*hormetikê phantasia*)—e.g., "it is appropriate (*kathêkei*) to contract at this loss," or "this gold is to-be-pursued." Thus, the Stoics treat emotions as our doings rather than merely as experiences that happen to us.

Given this two-part analysis of the belief causing an emotion, we might envision three ways in which an emotion can be "irrational" or "disobedient to reason": either (a) or (b) or both may be false or unwarranted; or the "such that" connection between (a) and (b) may be mistaken.[5] However, the majority of Stoic authors and
 interpreters explain the ↳ irrationality of emotion by rooting it in (a), a false belief that something good or evil is present or in prospect. To see why the emotions might—or might not—originate in false beliefs about good or bad, we need to take a short detour into Stoic value theory.

1.1. Good, Bad, Indifferent—With Respect to Possession, with Respect to Selection

According to the Stoics, *goods* are "such as to benefit" (Stobaeus 5d). This means that they are things which make our lives go well when we possess them. Correspondingly, evils are things the possession of which makes our lives go badly. But the only thing which makes our lives good when we have it is wisdom, which is the knowledge of good and bad and of how to conduct one's life, and which can be broken down into the individual virtues. So, the Stoics say that the only good is virtue and what participates in it—e.g., the virtuous action and the virtuous person (5a–b). Likewise, the only evil is ignorance and vice (and its participants). As for things external to the soul—health/sickness, wealth/poverty, beauty/ugliness—these are neither good nor bad, but rather indifferent with respect to the contribution that having them makes to our happiness or unhappiness. In fact, we are no happier for being healthy rather than sick, no unhappier for being poor rather than rich, and so on.

However, many indifferents, although their possession neither contributes to nor detracts from happiness, are nonetheless not *practically* indifferent; they rather have "selective value" (*eklektikê axia*, Stobaeus 7 = *SVF* 3.118, W 2.79, 28), are "in accordance with nature" (7a), and are "stimulative of impulse" (7c), such as health and strength. Conversely, many indifferents have "rejective disvalue," are "contrary to nature," and are "stimulative of anti-impulse," such as sickness and weakness. There are also indifferents *simpliciter* that are not stimulative of impulse, since they are neither according to nor contrary to nature, such as pointing a finger this way or that, or the state or capacity (*katastasis*) of body or soul that allows these to become sick or be deceived (7); tokens of this type may be according to or contrary to nature; for example, when the wise person points this way or that, or when the state of the body is one of health. There are, further, types every token of which is indifferent, such as having an odd or even number of hairs (7c). Finally, among the indifferents that have selective value, the "promoted" (*proêgmena*) have a great deal of selective value; examples include memory, technical expertise, keen sight, and children (7b, 7g). The "demoted" (*apoproêgmena*) have a great deal of disvalue (7g). And those which are neither promoted nor demoted are, for example, the color of someone's skin or the brightness of their eyes (7b).

The idea that things have selective value or disvalue even though they are neither good nor bad raises a host of questions. Are they really goods and evils by another name? By introducing them are the Stoics departing from what is thought to be the "eudaimonist" mainstream of Greek ethics, adding, to the view that we are and ought to be motivated to pursue things on the grounds that they are *good*, the view that we are and ought to be
p. 430 motivated to pursue things also on the grounds that they are *according to nature*? ↳ If so, when we pursue things as according to nature, we make the judgment that it is appropriate to pursue them—and need not add that it is good to have them. On the one hand, since non-rational animals also perform appropriate actions (Stobaeus 8) but do not make judgments of good and bad, it does not seem that the performance of actions requires thinking that the ends for the sake of which we act, or the actions themselves, are good. On the other hand, this position raises the possibility that on some occasions it will be more rationally choiceworthy to pursue promoted indifferents rather than virtue; but this the Stoics cannot allow.

Cicero's testimony suggests that these questions misconceive the kind of thing virtue is. Virtue is a condition that we cannot pursue directly in a way that would allow it to compete with indifferents, although right and wrong selection among indifferents make a difference to our wisdom and virtue. For when our selections themselves are according to nature, we begin to see in their order the beginnings of wisdom and virtue (*On Ends* 3.20–2). Cicero observes that if there were not any differences in value apart from the goodness of virtue and the badness of vice, wisdom would have no function (3.50).[6] In other words, virtue supervenes on and perfects appropriate action, which consists in selecting correctly among indifferents (3.60).

How does one select correctly among indifferents? On one view, "promoted," "having selective value," "according to nature" and their contraries in these contexts apply to *types* of things, but on any occasion a

token of a demoted/rejected/contrary-to-nature type will in fact be either in accordance with or contrary to nature. Chrysippus says that the foot, if it was wise, would get itself muddy in some circumstances (Epictetus 2.6.9). On this view, he means that cleanliness, although promoted and usually in accordance with nature, would not be in accordance with nature in those circumstances, so that one ought not, and the sage would not, select cleanliness under the circumstances; Chrysippus's point in using the example of the foot is that the foot, as part of a whole body, would, if it were wise, understand that it ought to select cleanliness or muddiness in the light of what is according to nature for the whole body. In this case the token being muddy would also be promoted.

To this it may be objected that in our texts the Stoics do not say that tokens of some promoted type can differ in value from the types of which they are tokens. Instead, the Stoics distinguish between being worth taking (*lêpton*) and being worth choosing (*haireton*) (Arius Didymus 5o). So, on an alternative view, their position is that sometimes the appropriate action (*kathêkon*) to be done is to take something that belongs to the demoted type and so is itself demoted and contrary to nature—although the *action* of taking it is not.[7]

This second view of the Stoic position on promoted indifferents and selective value may be usefully compared and contrasted with Ross's account of how prima facie (or perhaps more accurately pro tanto) duties bear on one's all-things-considered duty. According to Ross, we have many pro tanto duties—such as to keep promises, to benefit others, to refrain from injuring others, to improve ourselves, etc.—all of which weigh in the determination of our all-things-considered duty. On occasion, our all-things-considered duty might require
p. 431 acting contrary to one of our pro tanto duties—e.g., ↳ we may have to default on self-improvement in order to keep a promise. But the fact that in this case our duty of self-improvement was outweighed by our duty to keep our promise does not make our duty of self-improvement any less weighty. Determination of our all-things-considered duty requires that pro tanto duties be fundamental and have fixed weight. By contrast, what is of fixed value on the second view is the promoted indifferents rather than the actions selecting them. We might assimilate this to Ross's account by assigning to action types selecting promoted indifferents fixed values that correspond to the indifferents themselves, and then, in order to determine what is the all-things-considered appropriate action, adding or subtracting value depending on the other indifferents that result from the token action under the circumstances. This all-things-considered appropriate action will be the action in accordance with nature, the one for which there is a "reasonable" (*eulogos*) justification (Stobaeus 2.85, 13 = LS 59B), where the standard of reasonableness is *right* reason.[8]

But how can it ever be according to nature, and an appropriate action, for me to select sickness if my being sick is always demoted, and hence always contrary to nature? The Stoic end of living in agreement with nature, one's own and that of the whole cosmos, along with the fact that our nature is rational, the same as Zeus's (Diogenes Laertius 7.87–9 = LS 63C), imply that the reason for me to select sickness is that my being sick is in accordance with nature and divine reason, and appropriate selections and actions (*kathêkonta*) align with divine reason. (Perfect actions, *katorthômata*, are appropriate actions done from an understanding of that reason.) Such an evaluative variability between types and their tokens would explain why we must study physics (i.e., the nature of the whole) in order to know which token selections, actions, and attitudes are in accordance with nature, rather than resting content with the classifications of the types, health vs. sickness, into the promoted and the demoted, and inferring on the basis of this what is according to or contrary to nature in a particular case.[9] Or perhaps a better way to think about it is that my health qua rational being is nothing other than agreement with divine reason, even though this is my sickness qua animal body. Yet this too requires that a token sickness (of the body) can differ in whether it accords with nature (and hence in selective value and promotedness) from the type, sickness. It may be that what is objectionable on the second view is just the description of my selection as "selecting sickness," when what I select, if my action is indeed appropriate, is a state of the world in which I am sick. Accepting a redescription of the object of my selection in terms of a state of the world would enable Stoics to treat all cases of selection alike, without having to invoke the confusing talk of types and tokens which may differ in value from their types.[10]

A philosophically attractive alternative is that promoted indifferents are things we have *epistemic* rather than practical reasons to select.[11] On this account, an agent may use the fact that certain types are promoted—health, wealth, beauty, etc.—as a defeasible *reason to believe* that token acts of selecting health, wealth, beauty, etc. are according to nature. However, while my practical reasons to select something may be outweighed by my knowledge that my having that thing would be contrary to nature under the circumstances, my epistemic
p. 432 reasons should be *silenced* by such knowledge. So, our ↳ natural and learned inclinations to pursue health, strength, wealth, etc. on each occasion should be fully replaced as reasons for believing that some token object is in accordance with nature as we acquire knowledge of nature. In any case, the epistemic interpretation of promoted indifference and selective value is hard to square with the testimony of our sources: Stobaeus places indifferents "between good and bad" (7), characterizes promoted indifferents as "stimulative of impulse" by contrast with indifferents that are indifferent *simpliciter* (7c, cf. DL 7.102), claims that promoted indifferents can have more or less value (7b) (would this mean they are more or less reasonable to deem to-be-pursued?), and describes promoted indifferents as having "the second rank and value" so that they "to some extent come close to the nature of the good" (7g). Cicero finds it necessary to explain that the difference between goods and indifferents is one of *kind* rather than *quantity* of value (*On Ends* 3.34), treats the Stoic Aristo as heterodox for denying that indifferents have any value at all (3.31), and criticizes the Stoics for saying both that virtue is the sole good and that we have a natural impulse to seek the things conducive to living (4.78). On balance, these considerations support the view that the selective value that promoted indifferents have is a species of practical value, so that a thing's being in accordance with nature is a reason to select it.

One might wonder: if selective value is practical value, do the Stoics expect us to have counterparts to the emotions for pursuing and possessing promoted indifferents or for avoiding and possessing demoted indifferents—e.g., mild appetite and measured elation, or mild aversion and measured contraction? Stoic texts do not mention such pro- and con- attitudes. Yet these mild and measured attitudes may be what is left behind when the "overreaching" and the "excessive" and the "irrational" are removed from our impulses. Indeed, this may be the import of Epictetus's saying that he is "not unfeeling like a stone, or statue" (3.2.4). In §2, I will propose that "impulse with reservation" is such a counterpart to emotion. But for the moment, let us wrap up the question of the irrationality of the emotions.

1.2. How Mistakes in Value Theory Explain Why Emotions Are Irrational

On the one hand, the Stoics take deliberation to consist in selecting, among indifferents, those token outcomes, actions, or attitudes that are according to nature. On the other hand, virtue and vice do not have selective value or disvalue to weigh in deliberation, but instead supervene on and are expressed in an agent's selections among indifferents. It is not surprising, then, that we mistake promoted indifferents for goods and demoted indifferents for evils.

This might lead us to think that all emotions are rooted in a false judgment that some indifferent is good or bad.[12] We might then think that the way to eradicate our emotions is to learn the true values of the things we can have. Yet in discussing how to move a grieving person away from distress, Cicero criticizes Cleanthes's
p. 433 advice to "teach the ↳ sufferer that what happened is not an evil at all … that nothing is bad but shameful conduct" (*Tusculan Disputations* 3.76–7), for two reasons. First, this teaching, while true, is untimely, better suited to correcting folly than grief. And second,

> **T4** … a person might be distressed over the very thing which Cleanthes himself counts as the worst of evils … Socrates once persuaded Alcibiades he was unworthy to be called human … Alcibiades then became very upset, begging Socrates with tears to take away his shameful character and give him a virtuous one. What are we to say about this, Cleanthes? Surely you would not claim that the circumstance which occasioned Alcibiades' distress was not really a bad thing?

(*TD* 3.77, trans. Graver[13])

Alcibiades's distress at his own vice is what Brennan calls a "veridical emotion," since the (a) judgment, that his vice is an evil, is true. Unfortunately, Cicero does not explain what according to the Stoic is *wrong* with Alcibiades's distress, although a natural thought is that he should try to improve himself rather than grieving his vice. (Although it is not in his power, in the moment, to be virtuous, it is within his power to refrain from vicious action and to seek the understanding that would result in his becoming virtuous.[14] As Plato observes in *Republic* X, the perspective of grief is narrow, not taking into account the place of one's loss in the whole of one's life, or the place of one's life in the whole of nature, and further, grieving is inimical to initiatives that might improve one's situation, such as deliberation [604b–c]). Cicero does report that Chrysippus's cure for grief was to target the mourner's judgment that "mourning is something he ought to do, something just and appropriate" (*TD* 3.76), that is, the (b) judgment. And in an earlier discussion listing Stoic arguments for the claim that emotions are voluntary, Cicero remarks,

> **T5** Philosophers who are great, but have not yet attained a state of wisdom, understand … that they are afflicted with the worst of evils … For they are not wise, and there is no evil worse than unwisdom. Yet they do not grieve … [b]ecause where this sort of evil is concerned, no one makes that additional supposition: no one believes it is right, proper, and appropriate to be grieved over not being wise.
>
> (3.68)

These philosophers' ungrieving response to the recognition of their own folly and its badness suggests that the (a) goodness/badness and (b) appropriateness judgments are more independent of each other than it might seem from the **T1** and **T2** definitions of the emotions. If these judgments are indeed independent of each other, then might their truth or falsity also vary independently of each other? And might such independence be the reason that Chrysippus thought it valuable to offer as consolation to the grieving not the claim "the circumstances that give rise to gladness or desire are not goods and those which give rise to fear are not evils,"
p. 434 but rather that "the emotions are wrong in and ↳ of themselves" (*TD* 4.60)? But the latter may be spelled out in two different ways: (i) the (b) judgment itself is false (e.g., "it is appropriate to contract" and "it is appropriate to be elated" are false); or (ii) the conditional "if (a) then (b)" is false (e.g., "if something evil is/were present to me, it is/would be appropriate to be grieved" is false).

One might argue that the Stoics' belief in the providential arrangement of nature rules out (ii) the falsehood of "if (a) then (b)." Brennan suggests that given the providential design of everything, our emotion-systems, consisting of the (a) and (b) judgments, must be well-suited to our good condition, which is the condition of the sage, in whom the (a) judgment is correct.[15] And clearly the (b) judgment is perfectly suited to correct (a) judgments: if a genuine good is in prospect, it does conduce to our good to pursue it; if a genuine good is present to us, we should be elated. However, even Providence cannot build an animal that gets good and bad right from the get-go, because getting good and bad right is so difficult that it can only be achieved by long philosophical training. Once that training has succeeded, however, our well-designed emotion-systems take over. The case of grief discussed by Cicero is an exception. Since nothing bad is ever present to the sage, Providence has no cause to forge a connection between (a) and (b) for grief. This is why therapy for grief can target the (b) judgment without addressing the (a) judgment.

On the other hand, Stoic providentialism might give one reason to expect that widespread human capacities like grief (and all species of pain) must promote some human interest, as, e.g., remorse at one's own misdeeds is useful to moral improvement.[16]

Contrary to these providentialist thoughts, we have no evidence of Stoic philosophers thinking that (i) the *non*-conditional (b) judgment is ever true. And it is not only therapy against grief that targets the (b) judgment alone. Consider the case of anger, which is a desire to punish, contrary to what is fitting, the person who seems

to have committed injustice.[17] Anger qua species of appetite is an opinion that punishing a wrongdoer is a prospective good such that one should reach out for it. Seneca, following the traditional definition of anger as "a burning desire to avenge a wrong" (*On Anger* I.2), distinguishes "thinking oneself harmed and wishing to exact retribution" from anger, since an opinion so described could be obedient to reason (2.3.4), and goes on to offer two types of therapy for anger:

> **T6** We lose our tempers either with what cannot possibly have done us wrong or with what can … but if it is crazy to be angry with inanimate objects, it is just as crazy to be angry with animals who cannot do us wrong … And yet, if it is stupid to be angry with these, it is likewise stupid to be angry with children and people who are not much more sensible than children. There are things which cannot do harm, having no power that is not beneficent and wholesome [e.g., the gods] … [and things that have not the wish to harm us, such as] good magistrates, parents, teachers and judges …
>
> (2.26–8)

> Reflect above all on this. The power to hurt is foul and detestable, utterly foreign to man … It is
p. 435 sacrilege to harm your country; it is therefore sacrilege to ↳ harm a citizen, too … We would not even kill vipers or water-snakes or anything else with a poisonous bite or sting, if we could tame them or see to it that henceforward they were of no danger to us or to others. Neither should we harm a human being for having done wrong, but to prevent his doing it.
>
> (2.31, trans. Cooper and Procopé)

In Seneca's account in **T6** we can see the outlines of the two-part structure of an emotion despite the greater detail and focus on voluntariness and outstripping of reason. The proposition that (a') one has been wronged is not yet, but may be amped up into, a belief about good or evil (i.e., that the other's wrongdoing is an evil done to me) and the proposition that (b') one ought to be avenged is not yet an appropriate action judgment (i.e., that it is appropriate for me to punish him). To get from (b') to a desire to punish one would have to amp up the judgment from "one ought to be avenged" to "I ought to punish the wrongdoer" to "punishing the wrongdoer is a prospective good such that I ought to reach after it."

Seneca does not argue that punishing is never good (presumably it is good when a sage punishes a wrongdoer, since every action of a sage is good) or appropriate (both a sage and a non-sage could appropriately punish). This makes it all the more likely that it is the conditional judgment (ii) that is faulty.

Seneca's recommendations for therapy, alongside Chrysippus's in Cicero, suggest an alternative to the providential story: it is not only the correct assessment of good and bad (a) that is difficult, and not able to be built in to our design, but also the correct assessment of what one should do (b) in response to a correctly judged good or evil (or weighing of indifferents), for that requires a correct summing-up of all the considerations that ought to inform an appropriateness judgment. We may indeed be designed to move automatically between a positive value judgment and a motivation to pursue the thing valued (a useful piece of equipment!), but the deliberative problem arises because in most situations there is not just a single consideration. Rather than being providentially engineered, the connection between judgment (a) and judgment (b), which is an all-things-considered-judgment, is up to us to get right in practical reasoning. For this we have been given reason. And indeed, the fact that people, even fools, differ in whether they respond to injury with anger or hurt is evidence of the looseness of the connection between the two parts of the emotion. Seneca adds: if punishment ought to be inflicted, it is as a cure for the wrongdoer, and for that, the punisher will have to consider many more things than what the wrongdoer did (1.6).[18]

Thus, the appropriateness judgment (b) is to a significant extent independent of the goodness/badness judgment (a) and can take in much more content than the single goodness or badness judgment, just because what we ought to do, whether in response to indifferents or to actual goods or evils, is an all-things-considered

matter, not to be settled by response to the value of only some subset of those things. So, the Stoic answer to our question, "what is wrong with emotions?" is "they are irrational, involving false judgments of value," and these false judgments of value can either mistake indifferents for goods and evils, or mistake what it is
p. 436 appropriate to do in response to (apparent) ↳ goods and evils that are present or in prospect. Given that emotions necessarily implicate falsehood of some kind, it makes sense that we should try to eliminate them.

2. Instead of Emotion, Impulse with Reservation

Still, eliminating emotions requires replacing them with something. Our sources tell us directly about some sorts of feelings that survive the elimination of emotions (good feelings, which involve true judgments of good and evil in prospect or present, and pre-emotions, which involve no judgment), but they do not describe the practical attitudes we should have to promoted and demoted indifferents as feelings of any kind. Instead, the Stoics say, we should exercise impulse or avoidance, with reservation, toward these. Epictetus tells the person who is making progress:

> **T7** Remember that the promise of desire is success (*epituchia*) [in achieving] that which one desires, and the promise of aversion is not falling into that to which one is averse … if you are averse (*ekklinê[i]s*) to only those things which are contrary to nature among the things that are up to you, you will fall into none of the things to which you are averse; but if you are averse to sickness or death or poverty, you will fall into misfortune. So remove aversion from all of the things that are not up to us and place it instead on those things that are contrary to nature that are up to us. And for the present completely remove desire (*orexis*). For if you desire any of the things that are not up to us, you must be unfortunate, and, among the things that are up to us, of however many it would be fine to desire, none is yet present to you. But exercise only impulse for and against, and lightly and with reservation (*hupexairesis*) and without strain.
>
> (*Ench*. 2^{19}).

Impulse with reservation is also the sage's attitude toward promoted indifferents:

> **T8** They say that nothing happens concerning the Sage either contrary to his desire or to his impulse or to his inclination (*epibolê*), because he does all such things with reservation and none of the opposed things befalls him unforeseen.
>
> (Stobaeus *Ecl.* 2.115, 5W = *SVF* 3.564)

This enjoins us to recognize not only that whether or not we have the indifferents we pursue is not going to make a difference to our happiness, but also that since having the indifferents we pursue is not up to us, our pursuit of them should be "light" and "with reservation" and "without strain." This contrasts with our emotional attitudes, which are excessive and runaway impulses (Stobaeus *SVF* 3.378 = LS 65A; Galen *SVF* 3.462 = LS 65I, Seneca *On Anger* 1.7.4).

p. 437 What is impulse with reservation, exactly? Against the traditional suggestion that it is some sort of conditional impulse, Brennan maintains that the sage's impulses are unconditional even in relation to indifferents; but whereas the fool's future-tensed beliefs accompanying impulses are unreceptive to what happens in the world, the sage frequently updates her beliefs, and consequently her wishes and impulses, in response to what happens, with the result that even though an earlier impulse to something may be frustrated by what comes to pass, no present desire or impulse is ever so frustrated. Thus, reservation is exercised in the formation of beliefs, which has downstream consequences for her formation of impulses. So, for example, the sage wills, unconditionally, to be healthy, but along with this has the future-tensed belief, "I shall be healthy, unless it is

fated that I should not be healthy," which, as soon as she is sick, she replaces with "I shall be sick, unless it is fated that I should not be sick" at the same time acquiring a corresponding impulse to be sick. [20]

This combination of unconditional impulse with conditionalized future-tensed beliefs, while possible, treats our impulses themselves as relatively inflexible in ordinary practical reasoning, as compared to a combination of conditional impulses and beliefs. In ordinary practical reasoning my plans alter in response to the signals the world gives me about their likely success, and, as a result, my practical reasoning should include inquiry about the likely success of my plans. The Stoic recommendation is to add to these ordinary attitudes about my prospective doings an attitude of affirmation toward those events that happen to me. Presumably this includes affirming events I have reason to believe will happen to me (e.g., that I will be sick), and detaching myself from events I have reason to believe will not (e.g., that I will be healthy in the future). On Brennan's model, instead of my future-directed impulses being modified by my future-directed beliefs (e.g., instead of my impulse to walk for exercise becoming weaker as evidence that I will be sick mounts), they should disappear as I update my beliefs in response to the evidence, and be replaced by impulses "corresponding to" the new beliefs (now, I should have an unconditional impulse toward my future sickness). This is fine as far as *amor fati* goes, but what about planning? Shouldn't my belief, "it may be fated that I not be healthy" affect the content of my future-directed impulse toward health, and not only my present-directed impulses? Since desire and some impulses are future-directed, and nothing happens to the sage contrary to his desire or impulse (**T8**), it seems that the Stoics ought to prefer an account of impulse with reservation according to which the impulses themselves are conditional.

Bradley and McDaniel analyze the conditional desire that P on the condition that Q as a relation between a subject and two propositions: the object proposition P (e.g., I am healthy) and the condition proposition (e.g., Zeus wills that I be healthy).[21]

On this analysis my reserved impulse toward health would be a conditional impulse toward health on the condition that Zeus wills it, and would besatisfied if and only if

> (1) P (I am healthy) is true, *and*
>
> (2) Q (Zeus wills that I am healthy) is true.

p. 438 On Brennan's interpretation of impulse with reservation, instead of a conjunction between (1) and (2), there is a disjunction between them, so that my impulse will be satisfied if (1), I am healthy. About (2), Brennan argues that the satisfaction of this impulse is either too hard (because I cannot bring it about that Zeus wills X) or too easy (since if Zeus does will X, X will necessarily occur). Brennan also objects that the conditionalization can be reversed: wanting to be healthy unless Zeus wills otherwise is equivalent to wanting Zeus to will otherwise unless I am healthy. But that is blasphemous (160).

The claim that my conditional impulse is satisfied by the satisfaction of the corresponding categorical impulse gets the force of conditional impulses wrong. First, if I am pious, I do not want simply to be healthy, I only want to be healthy if (and indeed on the assumption that) it is what Zeus wills. Let us not get distracted by the fact that nothing happens contrary to Zeus's will. Bradley and McDaniels illustrate the crucial feature of conditional desires with an example: suppose I desire a beer after my bike ride if I am thirsty. Then, if after the ride I am not thirsty but you give me a beer, it does not seem like my desire (for a beer if I am thirsty) is satisfied (after all, I will turn down that beer)—nor is it frustrated; it is simply canceled because the condition for its satisfaction or frustration did not arise. On this analysis, all desires are desires of the form "I desire P on the condition that Q," and in the case of so-called unconditional desires, Q is "anything at all obtains"—which makes canceling impossible. Since conditional impulses can be satisfied, canceled, or frustrated (frustrated when the conditional proposition Q is true and the object proposition P is not), the reserved Stoic arms herself with the conditional proposition "unless Zeus wills otherwise" which guarantees non-frustration, as promised in **T8**, because it

builds in canceling conditions. Nor need we worry that conditional impulses lead me to want ("in vain" or blasphemously) Zeus to will anything in particular, for my impulse is an attempted specification of my general impulse to do whatever Zeus wills.

Turning now to the broader context for the particular advice to exercise impulse with reservation, **T7** also directs us to exercise aversion toward only contrary-to-nature things that are in our power, and to suspend desire entirely. We should not even desire what is "up to us," that is, virtue, since it is not yet present to us. Inwood maintains that this is because desire aims at the apparent good, and as a result, as long as we do not have the correct conception of the good to guide our desire we will go astray whenever we desire something.[22] But Epictetus points to *non-fulfillment* of the desire rather than its being for the wrong thing as the reason to suspend desire ("The promise of desire is the attainment of what it desires," 2.1). Further, if the problem with desire were going astray under a faulty conception of the good, why wouldn't a symmetrically faulty conception of the bad recommend that we suspend aversion? Instead, Epictetus directs us to restrict it to the things contrary to nature that are up to us, because the promise of aversion is not to *fall* into what is avoided. We cannot fall into ignorance and vice because we are already there, but presumably we can avoid vice-conducive actions by always selecting in accordance with nature to the best of our ability to determine what that is. So perhaps, to return to Cicero's consideration of Alcibiades, we cannot avoid aversion to ourselves as long as we are vicious, but we can reduce the occasions for aversion by restricting our vice-conducive actions.

If impulse with reservation is the conditional impulse with which we should replace desire, and if this secures us against the pain of frustrated desire, it would seem, once again, that the intervention by which we should eliminate the emotions is in our evaluative judgment (a): we should replace the judgment "good" or "bad" by "promoted indifferent" or "demoted indifferent," and we should pursue or avoid the indifferent on the basis of what nature seems to guide us to do, and, since we recognize that this seeming is fallible, we should conditionalize our pursuit or avoidance on the truth of the appearance. Let us, finally,consider a surprising intervention in our judgment (b).

3. Using Pity Against Anger on the Path to Elimination

Surprisingly, Epictetus recommends that if one is not yet able to eliminate emotion entirely, one should use pity, itself an emotion, to drive out anger. First, a little more about anger: Epictetus says that our anger depends on a false belief that injury harms its victim rather than the wrongdoer (1.18.11–20), and recommends that, to avoid anger, we restrict our good and evil to our moral character, thereby becoming invulnerable to harm (21–3), and thereby to anger, as well as to fear, etc. (3.10.17, cf. 2.10.18–19). For the true cause of anger is not the wrongdoer's action but his victim's opinion that he has been harmed. This is, of course, attacking the (a) judgment. To his students, would-be Stoic philosophers, Epictetus poses the question: do you think you can be a philosopher and eat, drink, be angry just as now? (3.15.10–11; cf. 3.2: to go into philosophy, you should not yield to anger, sorrow, envy; you should not be subject to compulsion, hindrance). But philosophy also provides resources for getting rid of anger: philosophy (but not Caesar) can promise secure freedom from pain, compulsion, hindrance, anger, etc. (3.13.11). Refraining from anger on each occasion is the way to avoid becoming hot-tempered (2.18.12–13, cf. 4.12.19: do not postpone until tomorrow the attempt to avoid getting angry).

However, in addition to these general recipes for avoiding anger along with the other emotions, Epictetus seems to encourage us to pity in circumstances where we might otherwise be angry with wrongdoers (1.18). Yet there isno doubt that the Stoics in general and Epictetus himself consider pity to be a species of pain, and to be eliminated.

> **T9** Pity is pain at someone appearing to suffer harm undeservedly (*kakopathein anaxiôs*).

(Stobaeus 10c)

T10 … who wants to live in grief, fear, envy, pity, desiring (*oregomenos*) things and failing to get them, being averse to (*ekklinôn*) things and falling into them?

p. 440 (Epictetus 4.1.3) ↳

T11 [To become a Cynic] … you should completely remove desire, and turn your aversion only toward the things that are within the province of choice (*ta prohairetika*); for you there should be no anger, no rage, no envy, no pity …

(3.22.13; cf. 3.24.43)

Now there are straightforward reasons to avoid pity insofar as pity could involve a false (a) goodness or badness judgment: the object of pity may be afflicted by some demoted indifferent (e.g., sickness or poverty) that the subject of pity falsely judges to be bad. Or the judgment that the harm suffered is undeserved (**T9**) could be false, for perhaps the harm is deserved because it is the result of wrong assents and vicious actions.[23]

But just as was the case with Alcibiades's grief at his own vice, it also seems possible to pity a wrongdoer for their genuinely bad condition of vice, in which case the (a) badness judgment would not be false. In such a case, perhaps pity would be faulted on the grounds that it involves contracting rather than doing something to improve the wrongdoer. One might also reason that the problem with pity is, as with grief, that it is pain and pain (the opinion of an evil present to one) is inconsistent with virtue and happiness, and so should be eliminated. But it is not obvious that what would not be present to the sage should not be present to the fool. Might it not be appropriate for the fool to pity the wrongdoer, given the objectively bad condition of the wrongdoer and the fool's current inability to have the prescribed all-things-considered response? I think the Stoic answer is no: even if the fool cannot improve the wrongdoer, she can strengthen her resolve to avoid vice in her own case. So, the (b) judgment is false; pity is not appropriate—but it is preferable to anger. And in fact, Epictetus uses the true judgment that the wrongdoer suffers the worst evil as a result of his vice to arouse pity and drive out anger:

T12 If what philosophers say is true, that all men have one principle, as in the case of assent the feeling (*to pathein*) that a thing is so, and in the case of dissent the feeling that a thing is not so, and in the case of a suspension of judgment the feeling that a thing is uncertain, so also in the case of a movement towards any thing the feeling that a thing is for a man's advantage, and it is impossible to think that one thing is advantageous and to desire another, and to judge one thing to be proper and to move towards another, why then are we angry with the many? They are thieves and robbers, you may say. What do you mean by thieves and robbers? They are mistaken about good and evil. Ought we then to be angry with them, or to pity them? But show them their error, and you will see how they desist from their errors. If they do not see their errors, they have nothing superior to their present opinion. This man who has been mistaken and deceived about the most important things, and blinded, not in the faculty of vision which distinguishes white and black, but in the faculty which distinguishes good and bad, should we not destroy him? If you speak thus, you will see how inhuman (*apanthrôpon*) this is which you say, and that it is just as if you would say, Ought we not to destroy this blind and deaf man? But if the greatest harm is the privation of the greatest things, and the greatest
p. 441 thing in every man is the will or choice such as it ought to be, and a man is deprived of ↳ this will, why are you also angry with him? Man, you ought not to be affected contrary to nature by the bad things of another.

(1.18.1–7, trans. Long with modifications)

This passage locates the origin of vicious actions in feeling (*pathein*), which is sometimes the word used for standing beliefs.[24] Epictetus recommends thinking about wrongdoers in a way that turns us from anger to pity and reform: reform their opinions and wrongdoers will no longer act in a way that causes you anger (cf. 1.26.3–7). And why pity them? One reason is that are in an objectively bad condition, worse off than the blind and deaf, because deprived of a good faculty of choice. A second is that they cannot help their actions, given their opinions, and they cannot help their opinions, given how things appear to them:

> **T13** What is the cause of assenting to anything? The fact that it appears to be (*to phainesthai hoti huparchei*). It is not possible then to assent to that which appears not to be. Why? Because this is the nature of the understanding, to incline to the true, to be dissatisfied with the false, and in matters uncertain to withhold assent. What is the proof of this? Feel (*pathe*) if you can, that it is now night. It is not possible. Take away your feeling that it is day. It is not possible. Feel or take away your feeling that the stars are even in number. It is impossible. When then anyone assents to that which is false, be assured that he did not intend to assent to it as false, for every soul is unwillingly deprived of the truth, as Plato says; but the falsity seemed to him to be true. Well, in acts what have we of the like kind as we have here truth or falsehood? We have the fit and the not fit (duty and not duty), the profitable and the unprofitable, that which is suitable to a person and that which is not, and whatever is like these … Medea thought that to indulge her passion and take vengeance on her husband was more profitable than to spare her children. It was so; but she was deceived. Show her plainly that she is deceived, and she will not do it; but so long as you do not show it, what can she follow except that which appears to herself (her opinion)? Nothing else. Why then are you angry with the unhappy woman that she has been bewildered about the most important things, and is become a viper instead of human creature? And why not, if it is possible, rather pity, as we pity the blind and the lame, so those who are blinded and maimed in the faculties which are supreme?
>
> (1.28.1–9, trans. Long with modifications, cf. 1.13.1–4)

Although it may seem that Epictetus is suggesting that our assents are compelled by externals, or impressions, it is more likely that he thinks that how things appear to us depends on our standing beliefs (and not only on the externals), which make different things appear (good) to different people; for example, revenge upon Jason appears good to Medea but not to a Stoic; and that accounts in part for why she assents to "revenge upon Jason is good." Thus, if we pity the blind person's inability to distinguish dark and light, we should pity Medea's inability to distinguish good from bad, rather than say she should be dead because she cannot tell good from bad (6–7).

Still, Epictetus's recommendation to pity is conditional on one's inability to dispense with emotion altogether:

> **T14** Person, if you must be disposed contrary to nature at another's evils, then pity him rather than hating him.
>
> (1.18.9)

Presumably if one has not yet made oneself invincible by restricting one's aversion to what is within the sphere of moral choice, as recommended in **T10** and **T11**, with the result that one is still vulnerable to the harm of judging that one has been harmed by losing some indifferent, or even by the wrongdoer's intent to harm one (something Seneca seems to worry about more than Epictetus), one can still recognize the badness of the wrongdoer's vicious condition and pity him for it. Perhaps one can think, "At least all I have lost is my lantern! He is losing his character!"

Epictetus's attitude toward pity and anger is also asymmetric along the dimension of self- vs. other-directed emotions. He urges us not to be angry with others—even suggesting that when we blame others, we are faulting Providence, an act of impiety—but he never urges us not to be angry at ourselves. And he urges us (if

we must feel some emotion) to pity others, but he does not say we should pity, rather than be angry at, ourselves.

Gill complains about this attitude of Epictetus,

> The Stoics … attenuate the linkage between responsibility and the reactive attitudes of praise and blame … [R]elationships … are conceived in strongly asymmetrical terms like Strawson's "objective" relationships. In effect, Marcus [Aurelius] and Epictetus are treating other people like children or psychiatric patients.[25]

Gill's assessment invokes a framework bequeathed to contemporary philosophy by Strawson, which distinguishes a participant attitude, the presupposition of which is that agents are free/responsible, a presupposition that (Strawson claims) is necessary for sustaining the "reactive" attitudes constitutive of interpersonal relationships (e.g., resentment, gratitude), from an "objective" attitude, which cancels this presupposition and along with it the reactive attitudes. Strawson argues against adopting the objective attitude that suspending the reactive attitudes is something we can do only in the exceptional case, and that even if we could suspend the reactive attitudes, we should not, because doing so would be corrosive of human relationships.[26]

Epictetus's call to pity the wrongdoer does rely on an objective attitude in some respects, for, as we saw in **T12** and **T13**, he likens the vice of the wrongdoer to the bad bodily condition of a disease and treats wrongdoing as a manifestation or symptom of a psychic disease rather than a freely willed action. Further, at least some members of his audience think that pity involves looking down on the object of pity (4.6.18–25), and surely looking down on one another is corrosive of human relationships.

p. 443 On the other hand, both **T12** and **T13** argue for pity to replace anger in part on the basis of our human kinship with the wrongdoer: we all act on our feeling (**T12**) or appearances (**T13**), and our cause for complaint with the wrongdoer will vanish if we can show her that she is deceived, for her actions will also change when her beliefs change. But this would require engagement with the wrongdoer's beliefs, which belongs not to the objective but to the participant attitude. Still, we should not think pity necessary for such attempts, and ultimately, it is to be eliminated. Presumably this is because, like Alcibiades, distressed at his own vice, the pitying subject wrongly thinks that pitying is the (b) all-things-considered most appropriate response to the pitied object's badness, instead of the attempt to improve her (and oneself) that *may* follow on the pity but also does not *require* pity.

Notes

1. Although **T1** says the opinion "is" the emotion, and **T2** says that it "causes" the emotion, nothing in this chapter turns on the difference, so I will use the weaker expression "causes the emotion" from here on.

2. See, e.g., Brennan 2005: 91, "what the Stoics are discussing is something more like motivations than emotions; their treatment of fear puts it in parallel to desire, by focusing less on how it feels, and more on the fact that it makes you avoid or flee from something, just as desire makes you pursue or go towards something." Meyer 2018 introduces an important correction to any supposition that the passions, insofar as they are impulses, motivate actions "in the manner of intentions and acts of will" (111): in fact, the Stoics treat impulses themselves as the outputs of impressions followed by assent, whether these outputs take the form of bodily limbs moving or souls fluttering. However, the fact that impulses are themselves things we do subsequent to assenting to impulsive impressions does not rule out their having a role in the production of further behaviors (e.g., pursuing the prospective good or wailing about the present evil).

3. Graver 2007: 30–4 documents the Stoics' rich characterizations of emotion in terms of how they feel and Kamtekar 2019 argues that Seneca's *Medea* uses (2) the way the emotions feel in order to identify them without arousing audience sympathy.

4. (a) is the judgment (e.g.), "an evil is present," not "a present thing is evil." Graver 2007: 40–1 explains that although an emotion is occurrent it rests on a standing (her term is "dispositional") belief, e.g., that a given type of thing is evil. (a) arises because the standing belief "this type of thing is evil" is activated by the occurrent judgment that a token of this type of thing is present. This explains why two people, Cebes and Plato, might have the same occurrent judgment (e.g., "Socrates is dead"), but have different emotional responses: their standing beliefs differ (e.g., Cebes's standing belief is, "Death is an evil," whereas Plato's is, "Death is neither good nor bad").

5. Most scholars take the connection between (a) and (b) to be too close for this last possibility. For example, according to Brennan 1998: 29 (a) is an opinion resulting from assent to an evaluative impression in the form of a proposition, and (b) is an impulse resulting from assent to a proposition along with the corresponding impulsive impression in the form of the predicate. According to Klein 2021 (a) concerns *having* an evil (i.e., is about having something that will make me unhappy) and (b) concerns what I should *do* in response ↳ (contract). My standing evaluation of something external as good or bad (a) is expressed in (b) a particular impulse that moves me to perform a specific action (in the case of fear, it would be some act of shrinking to avoid the supposed evil).

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6. For thorough and thoughtful discussion of the role of indifferents in Stoic deliberation, see Barney 2003 and Brennan 2005: 183–230. See also Tsouni, this volume and Klein, this volume.

7. Brennan 1996: 332–3 says, in the case of the sage's decision to commit suicide that while considerations of preferred indifferents are central to this decision, "there is no evidence that death itself becomes a preferred indifferent or according to nature on those occasions … Rather, death remains dispreferred and contrary to nature, even though pursuing it in this case is in accordance with reason." White 2010: 112, note 3 observes: while our sources report token-variability in duties (appropriate actions) according to circumstance, they do not report token-variability in value of objects according to circumstance. White attributes to the Stoics a distinction between what is worth taking (*lêpton*) and what is to be taken (*lêpteon*), such that sometimes, what is worth taking is not to be taken. Klein 2015: 254 adds: "the promoted and dispromoted status of indifferents *must* be fixed independently of any reference to virtue if indifferents are to play the deliberative role Stoics assign to them."

8. Brennan 1996.

9. Cf. Menn 1995: 23–9.

10. I would like to thank Tad Brennan for pointing out this further implication.

11. Klein 2015: 231, "An indifferent will count as promoted just in case there is reason to believe that selecting or pursuing an object or circumstances of its type is usually required by the plan expressed in rational nature."

12. Nussbaum 1994: 378 proposes that the falsity consists in ascription of high value to "vulnerable external things … that are not fully under our control." In Kamtekar 1998 on the role of *aidôs* in moral progress in Epictetus, I had assumed that an emotion could only be based on a false judgment of good or bad (i.e., no veridical emotions), and so had concluded that *aidôs* (classified as a good feeling, viz., caution about justified censure, belonging only to the sage [DL 7.116; Andronicus, *SVF* 3.432]), when it appears in the non-sage, would have to be a true appropriateness judgment made independently of any goodness judgment. I overlooked the possibility that a non-sage could make a true goodness or badness judgment, viz. that justified censure is bad, and *on that basis* make a false appropriateness judgment, having an emotion as a result. Thus, the case for Epictetus's not counting *aidôs* as an emotion but instead as a disposition to make certain appropriateness judgments without goodness judgments requires an account of why the non-sage should refrain from goodness judgments.

13. All translations of passages from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* are from Graver 2002.

14. Brennan 1998 suggests that the irrationality common to all emotions is that they are "weak assent" to an impression—whether that impression is false, true, or kataleptic (1998: 48). In that case, the emotions are no more irrational than anything else done by a fool. But then why do the Stoics single out emotions for elimination? Is it perhaps that their freshness makes us more liable to yield to them as we did to all impressions prior to the age at which we acquired the capacity of assent? (I would like to thank Terry Irwin for this suggestion.)

15. Brennan 2002: 182–3

16. Graver 2007: 200–11

p. 445 17. Stobaeus *Ecl*. II 92.18 = *SVF* 3.395; cf. Diogenes Laertius VII.113 = *SVF* 3.396; *timôrias tou êdikêkenai dokountos*, Andronicus *Peri Pathôn* = *SVF* 3.397; cf. *eius qui iniuria laesisse* Cicero *Tusc.* iv.21 = *SVF* 3.398.

18. Gartner 2015 explains that Seneca's account of the three movements of anger puts assent at the end of a movement during which we encounter many impressions or entertain many propositions without yet assenting to them (e.g., that you have harmed me, which gives rise to a retaliatory proto-impulse; but also, that you are much more powerful than me, which checks that proto-impulse). This is the space in which not only psychic conflict, but also deliberation before impulse and action, can occur.

19. cf. *Disc*. 3.13.21, 3.22.13, 1.4.1–2; cf. also Marcus Aurelius 4.1; cf. Seneca *Ben*. 4.34, "if nothing intervenes to impede".

20. Brennan 2000: 163-4.

21. Bradley and McDaniel 2008.

22. Inwood 1985.

23. Some Stoic definitions of pity however do not include the desert clause (e.g., pain at the evils of others, *ep' allotriois kakois*, *SVF* 3.416.21–2 = Nemesius *DNH* 19; although this is also given as the definition of a distinct emotion, *oiktos*, *SVF* 3.414.43 = Andronicus *Peri Pathôn* 2).

24. Galen in *SVF* 3.429, cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.111 on Chrysippus = *SVF* 3.456; both discussed in Brennan 1998.

25. Gill 2004: 213

26. Strawson 1962.

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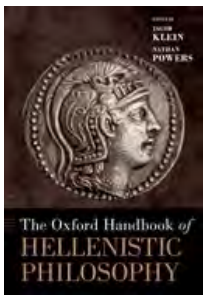
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CHAPTER

19 The Stoics on Appropriate Action

Georgia Tsouni

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Abstract

The chapter traces the development of the notion of the *kathêkon*—frequently translated as "duty" or "appropriate action" —from the early phase of the Stoa down to the Roman period. The first section (§1) focuses on the definition of the *kathêkon* handed down to us from the school's early period and on the main distinctions and classifications surrounding it. The second section (§2) shows how appropriate actions involving social relationships are grounded in natural appropriation (*oikeiôsis*), according to the Stoics. Finally, drawing mainly on examples from Cicero's *De Officiis*, the third section (§3) discusses those appropriate actions that are conditioned by particular circumstances together with the prospect of conflict among *kathêkonta*.

Keywords: kathêkon, appropriate action, duty, oikeiôsis, Cicero, De Officiis, Stoics

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This chapter offers an overview of the development of a crucial notion in Stoic ethical theory, denoted by the term *kathêkon* (roughly, the "appropriate") and often hailed as the most salient ancient precursor to modern understandings of "duty," from its first appearances in early Stoic sources down to philosophically rich developments of the notion later in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The first section (§1) will discuss the early Stoic definition of *kathêkon* and the most important theoretical distinctions that we find surrounding it in that period. The second section (§2) will be concerned with the way *kathêkonta* were discussed in the context of social relationships, primarily in later Stoic sources. The third section (§3) will focus on Stoic discussion, especially in the Roman period, of the choice of *kathêkonta* (appropriate actions) under particular circumstances and the prospect of conflict among *kathêkonta*.

1. The Early Stoic Notion of the *kathêkon*

Zeno, the founder of the Stoa, is credited with introducing the topic of *kathêkonta* into philosophical discourse (DL 7.108 = LS 59C). Following this innovation, discussion about "appropriate actions" became an integral part of the Stoic philosophical curriculum. Thus, the topic "on appropriate actions" (*peri tôn kathêkontôn*) is, at least from Chrysippus onwards, firmly established in the Stoic division of the ethical part of philosophy, following (according to the report of Diogenes Laertius) the topic of "primary value and of actions" and preceding that of "inducements and refrainments."[1] The importance assigned to this area of philosophical ethics is also shown
p. 448 by the fact that almost all the major figures of the early phase of the school wrote treatises *On Appropriate* ↳ *Action* (*Peri tou Kathêkontos*); such treatises are attested for both Zeno and his successor Cleanthes, as well as for Sphaerus and Chrysippus.[2] Zeno seems to have appealed to an etymology that derived the term *kathêkon* from the expression "what falls to particular persons" (DL 7.108 = LS 59C).[3] This hints at an understanding of the *kathêkon* as something "assigned" to one by a higher principle, which, according to the assumptions of Stoic metaphysics, would be the all-encompassing cosmic *logos*.[4] The word has accordingly been translated as "what is incumbent upon one" or "what is appropriate" or "befitting," but the translation "duty" has also been influential in modern times.[5] As we shall see, however, the translation of *kathêkon* as "duty" does not entirely do justice to the broader application of the term attested in early Stoic sources.[6]

The *kathêkon* is defined in the doxography of Stoic ethics that survives in the *Anthology* of Stobaeus as "that which is consistent [*sc.* with nature] in life, which, after having been done, admits of a well-reasoned defense";[7] a variation of this apparently standard definition is present in Diogenes Laertius as well.[8] Cicero also provides a Latin translation of the second part of the Stoic definition in *De Finibus* 3.58.[9] He translates there the Greek expression "to admit of a defense" (*apologian echei*/*apologismon ischei*), which appears in the two versions of the standard definition of the *kathêkon*, with the Latin for "to render an account" (*rationem reddere*), and he uses the judicial expression "to give a defense" (*causam reddere*) as an equivalent of it at *De Officiis* 1.101. Cicero also translates the expression "well-reasoned" (*eulogon*) that appears in the Greek definition with the more permissive adjective *probabilis*, which means "worthy of approval," "likely," or "convincing."[10] This translation of the term may reflect the influence of the New Academy, which employed the epistemological standard of the "reasonable" (*eulogon*) as the basis of action.[11]

As the bracketed phrase in the translation of the standard definition of *to kathêkon* suggests, the word "consistent" (*akolouthon*) was implicitly supplemented in the original Stoic definition by the dative "with nature" (*phusei*) and, consequently, conveyed the idea of agreement between one's actions and nature as a regulative principle.[12] For a living being to act consistently with nature evidently means both that it acts in a way that is appropriate for the kind of living being it is and that it acts in a manner consistent with its place as part of cosmic nature, which has the characteristics of rationality and providentiality.[13] This ideal of an alignment between one's life and (cosmic) nature is variously expressed in the Stoic surviving accounts of the "chief good" (*telos*); thus, to Zeno is ascribed the formula that one should live "in accordance with the reason (*logos*) of nature," whereas Chrysippus explained the "chief good" (*telos*) as "living in accordance with the experience of the things that happen naturally."[14] The same idea is reflected in the formula "following nature,"[15] which captures the idea of "consistency" (*akolouthia*) that figures in the standard definition of the *kathêkon.* Later on, Diogenes of Babylon renders the "chief good" (*telos*) itself as "reasoning well (*eulogistein*) in one's selection of the things which are according to nature,"[16] a formula that again offers a link to the definition of the *kathêkon* as "what, after having been done, admits of a well-reasoned defense." Archedemus reformulates the "chief good" (*telos*) with an explicit reference to *kathêkonta*: "to live fulfilling all appropriate actions."[17]

p. 449 The *kathêkon* thus often appears to be defined in our sources from a specifically human perspective, since these definitions employ the notions of "action" (*praxis*) and "defense or justification" (*apologia, apologismos*), which apply only to rational animals, in the Stoic view.[18] But what does it mean to provide a "well-reasoned" (*eulogon*) defense of one's actions? This formula becomes more comprehensible if one takes into account the rational

organization of cosmic nature as the Stoics understand it. For a well-reasoned defense or justification of action aims to show that it conforms to principles of human conduct that rational nature has established.[19] The actions of the Stoic sage, whose life realizes the *telos* formulas (discussed earlier in this chapter) are justified in this way with perfect reliability and consistency.[20] But our sources make clear that non-sages may also perform appropriate actions, and that their actions may often be justified in this way as well.[21]

Although we can see the significance of the notion of the *kathêkon* for ethical theory quite clearly, our surviving evidence in Diogenes Laertius and Stobaeus suggests that, at least in the early Stoa, the term *kathêkon* did not have a narrowly ethical meaning—i.e., it was not used exclusively in the context of an account of human (or rational) action. Thus, in Stobaeus we read that the *kathêkon* "extends even to the nonrational animals, since they are also active in some way consistently with their own nature."[22] In the account of Diogenes Laertius this extends to plants as well, since, as his source states, one may observe *kathêkonta* even in their case (DL 7.107 = LS 59C). There is not necessarily an inconsistency in applying the idea of a "well-reasoned defense" to animals and plants, since even if they are not able to provide this for themselves, a rational observer may do so, at least in principle, by noting the ways in which their growth and behavior comports with their own peculiar natures and with the rationality and providentiality of nature as a whole.[23]

Another surviving definition refers to the *kathêkon* as an "activity which is appropriate (*oikeion*) to constitutions which are according to nature."[24] The use of the word "appropriate" (*oikeion*) here suggests that the early Stoics drew a connection between their account of *kathêkonta* and their view that there is a natural mechanism of "appropriation" (*oikeiôsis*) according to which every living creature is favorably disposed toward itself and toward what is conducive to its survival and flourishing.[25] In line with this, Cicero deems the "primary *kathêkon*" to be the conservation of a living creature in its natural state.[26] Appropriation (*oikeiôsis*) is manifested in the fact that, as the Stoics suppose, living beings that possess sensation are from the beginning of their lives aware of their own constitutions and, in consequence of this, have an impulse toward the things that are suited to them; these latter things are deemed "appropriate" (*oikeia*) or "according to nature" (*kata phusin*).[27] *Kathêkonta* originate from this impulse and, in the human case, are directed at attaining the things which are "according to nature" (the so-called promoted indifferents).[28] In the case of human beings, the discovery of *kathêkonta* is integral to the process of acquiring a fully articulate conception of the good, which enables a rational agent to act in a way that is virtuous and wholly consistent with nature.[29]

The specific manifestation of Stoic nature's providential care and the teleological success of particular life
p. 450 forms depend on the constitution of each kind of organism; ↳ thus, although both plants and animals exhibit *kathêkonta*, as discussed earlier, their *kathêkonta* differ in accordance with their differing constitutions. To illustrate this point, the Stoics employ a hierarchical model in which the capacities belonging to different kinds of organism are organized in a "ladder of being" (*scala naturae*) in some respects reminiscent of the hierarchy of organisms sketched in the second and third book of Aristotle's treatise *On the Soul*.[30] Thus the Stoic account in DL 7.86 (LS 57A) states that nature "is no different in regard to plants and animals," since it also "directs" (*oikonomei*) the former, albeit without the use of "impulse" (*hormê*) and "perception" (*aisthêsis*).[31] Animals, on the other hand, possess both perception and impulse, which are directed toward the things that are "appropriate" (*oikeia*) and natural (*kata phusin*) for them. Finally, humans, in addition to perception and impulse, are given reason (*logos*), which answers to "a more perfect management" (*kata teleioteran prostasian*); thus, "to live correctly according to reason comes to be natural (*kata phusin*) for them."[32] The Stoics accounted for each of the diverse capabilities of living forms by referring to the various degrees of tension of the divine "breath" (*pneuma*) inhering in them.[33]

The evidence moreover suggests that the activities of all living beings capable of movement begin with impressions whose content is in some way practical, registering an action as appropriate to the organism. The Stoics used a particular expression for impressions of this kind, characterizing an impression capable of prompting action as a motivating or "hormetic" impression (*phantasia hormêtikê*; Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 86, 17–18 W. = *SVF* 3.40). In the rational case, to assent to a motivating impression is to judge *that* some prospective action

is appropriate (*kathêkon*), resulting in a practical impulse toward it (Stobaeus *Eclogai* 87.3–5 W). It moreover seems that the Stoics explained even wrong actions (*hamartêmata*) and passions (*pathê*) along these lines, as rooted in assent to content that envisions some token action or affect as *kathêkon*.[34] This suggests that the conception of the *kathêkon* functions for the Stoics as something like the description under which an agent acts (whether consciously or not), even in those cases in which the envisioned action is not, in fact, *kathêkon*.[35] In the special case in which appropriate action involves a conception of "indifferent" things that are nevertheless "according to nature" (i.e., the class of things which are deemed "promoted indifferents" in Stoic theory) the Stoics use the term "selection" (*eklogê*, Lat. *selectio*) to characterize the impulse that precedes action.[36] At the same time, when appropriate action is based on a true and fully articulate conception of the good, the impulse that precedes it is called "choice" (*hairesis*) and belongs only to sages.[37]

The early Stoics also introduced into their ethics a further set of distinctions which aim at distinguishing the *kathêkonta* performed by sages from those performed by non-sages. The *kathêkonta* performed by sages are characterized as "perfect" (*teleia*) and receive the particular name of *katorthômata* ("achievements" or "right actions"), a term also appearing in the title of a lost treatise of Chrysippus (*SVF* 3, 200.38).[38] An additional description of the latter in both Greek and Latin sources characterizes *katorthômata* as *kathêkonta* that "contain all the numbers in full," an expression indicating their completeness.[39] "Achievements" or "right actions" thus
p. 451 appear to be ↳ a subset of *kathêkonta*: they are *kathêkonta* that meet further, demanding conditions that are linked to the disposition (*diathesis*) from which the agent acts.[40] In particular, *katorthômata* are causal results of "knowledge" (*epistêmê*), a disposition described by the Stoics as "an apprehension which is secure and irreversible by reason."[41] When performed by a sage, *kathêkonta* are characterized by perfect consistency and reliability and so count as *katorthômata* as well.[42] *Katorthômata* are accordingly described as "activations according to virtue" (*kat' aretên energêmata*), relevant examples being "exercising practical wisdom" or "acting justly" (Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 85.20–86.1 W.; ibid. 96.20–2 W.). A further definition characterizes them as actions done in accordance with "correct reason" (*orthos logos*), meaning that, in addition to admitting of a "well-reasoned" (*eulogon*) defense, they are done on the basis of the perfected knowledge (*epistêmê*) that belongs to the sage.[43]

With *kathêkon* actions the Stoics contrast "wrong actions" (*hamartêmata*), so called by virtue of the fact that their exercise fails to admit of a reasonable defense. A wrong act (*hamartêma*) is what is (generally speaking) "contrary to the appropriate for a rational being."[44] Stoic texts moreover report a category of *kathêkonta* that are characterized in both Greek and Latin sources as intermediate (*mesa kathêkonta* or *media officia*): According to Cicero's evidence, the standard definition of the *kathêkon* discussed earlier refers to this category of intermediate appropriate actions and is thus common to sages and non-sages alike.[45] It is, however, controversial what the basis for the categorization of certain appropriate actions as intermediate is. According to one interpretation the characterization of these actions as intermediate signals merely that they are being considered abstractly, independently of the moral disposition from which they are performed and, therefore, independently of their goodness or badness.[46] On this interpretation, no token action will in fact be indifferent, since it will be done either on the basis of vice or on the basis of virtue. Accordingly, on this interpretation a specific *instance* of the *kathêkon* on the part of the non-sage (while conforming to what is reasonable) will still fall under the category of "wrong action" (*hamartêma*). This seems to be in line with existing evidence that for the Stoics wisdom does not manifest itself in degrees and with sources stating that sages "*always* do right in everything they take upon themselves, while the fools [*sc.* always] do wrong."[47]

2. The Social Dimension of *kathêkonta*

Numerous titles of works "On Appropriate Actions" (*peri kathêkontôn*) survive from the post-Chrysippean era of the Stoic school down to Panaetius and his pupils, Posidonius (DL 7.124; 7.129) and Hecaton of Rhodes (*De Officiis* 3.63), attesting to the lively interest of the followers of Chrysippus and of the so-called Middle Stoics in the topic of *kathêkonta*.[48] The work of these later Stoics (some of whom had emigrated to Rome) suggests an emphasis on the narrower use of the term *kathêkon* as applying specifically ↳ to human action, as well as an attempt to develop a systematic account of the diverse types of *kathêkonta* that pertain to various domains of human action. There seems to have been particular focus in this period on social *kathêkonta*—i.e., on appropriate actions applying to one's role as member of a community—reflecting a fundamental belief that the Stoics share with Aristotle that human beings are by nature "political" or "social" animals.[49] The most fundamental manifestation of this social human nature is for the Stoics the love that parents have for their offspring, something suggesting a social type of natural "appropriation."[50] Appropriate actions relating to one's social identity, for example honoring one's parents or serving one's country, already constitute paradigmatic examples of *kathêkonta* in sources that seem to reflect early Stoicism.[51]

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Some of these developments are not transmitted directly to us through their Greek sources but indirectly through Cicero's philosophical work *De Officiis*, which is our largest distinct body of surviving evidence on the Stoic account of *kathêkonta*. Cicero translates *kathêkon* with the Latin *officium*, thereby enriching it with connotations that were foreign to the Greek term.[52] His *De Officiis* explicitly relies on a treatise "On Appropriate Action" (*Peri tou Kathêkontos*) of the (Middle) Stoic Panaetius, at least for the content of its first two books.[53] It is suggestive, moreover, that Cicero renders Panaetius's work in Latin in a plural form, thus emphasizing the plurality of *kathêkonta* rather than their common definition. According to Cicero, Panaetius explicitly divided the inquiry into appropriate action into three categories (*tria genera exquirendi*): the first category concerns the question whether a prospective action is virtuous or not (*honestum an turpe*), the second whether it is expedient or inexpedient (*utile an inutile*), and the third how to judge in case there is an apparent conflict between the two—i.e., between the virtuous and the expedient courses of action.[54] The structure of Cicero's *De Officiis* apparently follows the division of Panaetius; thus, in the first book, it is shown how *kathêkonta* derive from each of the four fundamental virtues toward which we are drawn by nature, namely wisdom (both theoretical and practical), justice, courage, and temperance. Here particular emphasis is placed on the virtues that preserve the "fellowship of human beings," and especially on those that derive from justice (*iustitia*) and the related virtue of beneficence (*beneficentia*), which appears in the form of either kindness (*benignitas*) or liberality (*liberalitas*) (*De Officiis* 1.20).

Cicero's *De Officiis* is explicitly oriented less toward theoretical questions and more toward providing practical advice (*praecepta*) by which the practice of life (*usus vitae*) can be "molded" in all domains.[55] In line with this, Cicero refers extensively to the way *officia* apply to different degrees of human society (*gradus ... societatis hominum*; *De Officiis* 1.53), discussing obligations to one's parents, wife, children, friends, and country, and laying particular emphasis, with regard to the latter, on *officia* toward the "Roman republic" (*res publica*).[56] The Stoics however did not narrowly restrict human community to the political sphere, but also refer to a community that embraces all human beings. Thus in the Stoic account at Cicero's *De Finibus* 3.63 (LS 57F), Cato refers to the existence of a universal fellowship with other human beings, grounded in "natural appropriation."[57] What underlies this account is the early Stoic idea that the universe is a single city and state shared by human beings and gods and governed by a rational divine ↳ will.[58] With this account in view, Cicero discusses appropriate actions directed toward humanity as a whole in *De Officiis* 1.51–2. These *officia* seem to be restricted to basic humanitarian actions, such as providing means of subsistence to those in need or guidance to someone who is lost.[59] Still, the recognition of *kathêkonta* based on the "fellowship of the human race" (*societas generis humani*) generally prevents us from harming another human being in the pursuit of our own interests, even those to whom we stand in no close relation.[60]

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In the "lectures" (*diatribai*) of the Stoic teacher Musonius Rufus, who was active in Rome in the first century AD, we find a discussion of what is "befitting" (*prosêkon*), a word that seems to be nearly synonymous with *kathêkon*. Following the early Stoics, Musonius regards "befitting" actions as grounded in nature.[61] Among his lectures we find one dedicated to "what is the befitting source of revenue for a philosopher," where Musonius suggests that agriculture in particular is a suitable livelihood for a philosopher.[62] His teaching extends to the discussion of appropriate food (Lecture 18 Hense) and even to the appropriate way of cutting one's hair (Lecture 21 Hense). Musonius's surviving lectures also attest a preoccupation with social arrangements and obligations; thus, he advocates marriage as an appropriate choice for one who philosophizes (Lectures 13 and 14 Hense) by connecting the institution of marriage to the virtues of justice and beneficence.[63] Among Musonius's most original contributions is the idea that it is appropriate for women to practice philosophy, since this enables them to perform in the best way the activities appropriate to the care of the household and to fulfill the roles of mother and spouse (Lecture 3 Hense). Though it is possible that other Stoics adopted similar positions with respect to women,[64] evidence for Stoic views along these lines first appears in the writings of Musonius.

Musonius's pupil Epictetus discusses *kathêkonta* mainly with regard to human relationships (*scheseis*), offering relevant advice in the lively manner characteristic of the *Discourses* which survive under his name.[65] For example, at *Diss.* 2.10 Epictetus urges us to consider each of the "roles" (*prosôpa*) that we assume, beginning with that of human being, and continuing with that of citizen, son, brother, or father.[66] In each case, he suggests that the name, "when reflected upon, indicates the actions appropriate to it."[67]

The most extensive surviving treatment of the social dimension of *kathêkonta* is in the extant fragments of the late Stoic Hierocles (second century AD) preserved by Stobaeus, which possibly derive from a single treatise *Peri Kathêkontos*.[68] In these fragments, we find numerous passages on "how to behave" (*pôs chrêsteon*) in the context of various relationships. Hierocles's treatment of *kathêkonta* extends to the discussion of appropriate actions toward the gods, which are discussed before *kathêkonta* toward one's country and those toward one's parents, followed by a discussion of appropriate actions toward one's immediate relatives (siblings, wife, and children) and more distant family (other relatives).[69] The surviving excerpts offer concise advice (*parainesis* or *hupothêkê*) about how to view relationships generally and about actions that are appropriate depending on the closeness of the relationship at hand. Thus, in the discussion of how to treat one's parents, Hierocles suggests
p. 454 that we should view them as, among other ↳ things, domestic gods, benefactors, and most reliable friends. Accordingly, one should take walks with one's parents or dine with them but also occasionally assume rather menial services, such as washing their feet or making their bed.[70]

The most famous passage from Hierocles's surviving fragments illustrates our obligations to others with an image of concentric circles.[71] At the center is the agent's own "mind" (*dianoia*), enclosed in turn by circles representing the body, parents, siblings, spouse, and offspring. The outermost circles illustrate close and distant relatives, followed by one's fellow-citizens and, ultimately, by humanity as a whole, as represented by the largest enclosing circle. Although the model illustrates the progressive intensity of our good-will, starting with ourselves (the highest degree of intensity) and ending with humanity at large (the lowest degree of intensity), Hierocles suggests that one should aim to draw the circles of association in which one is embedded inwards, and thus attempt to effect an "assimilation" (*exomoiôsis*) of those who stand at a greater distance from oneself to those who are nearer.[72] To this end, Hierocles adds a practical piece of advice suggesting the basic kinship of humanity: we are to use the names of closer relatives in order to address people who are more distantly related to us.[73]

Hierocles's discussion of appropriate actions toward others also provides a link to the early Stoic discussion of *kathêkonta*. For example, in Hierocles's fragments on the topic of marriage we find the idea that marriage (a characteristically appropriate action, unless special circumstances demand otherwise) is rooted in our very nature and corresponds to the "function" (*ergon*) that nature has set out, namely the generation of children and the leading of a stable life.[74] Following the early Stoic justification of *kathêkonta*, Hierocles adds that "the

selection of appropriate actions should be in accordance with the constitution given to us by nature," adding that all animals, and even plants, live each according to its natural constitution.[75]

3. Roman Developments: Cicero's *De Officiis*

Cicero's discussion in *De Officiis* shows a preoccupation with the particularist aspects of *kathêkonta*—i.e., with the specification of actions that constitute *kathêkonta under particular circumstances*. A case in point is the way one's individual nature, or "role" (*persona*), affects the determination of actions that are appropriate on a given occasion.[76] Thus, given his "austere" character, it was proper for Marcus Cato to commit suicide after his defeat by Caesar, but the same did not apply to his companions (*De Officiis* 1.112).[77] Cicero's reference to the particular circumstances or "occasions" (*tempora*) of actions evidently maps onto a Stoic distinction which is known from Diogenes Laertius (DL 7.109 = LS 59E) between *kathêkonta* "independent of circumstances" (*aneu peristaseôs*) and those "dependent on circumstances" (*peristatika* or *kata peristasin*).[78] Examples of the former include
p. 455 things such as taking care of one's health and sense organs, whereas ↳ examples of the latter include things like mutilating oneself and sacrificing one's property. Cicero tells us that Posidonius's work contained a section "on the appropriate action according to circumstances,"[79] a category Cicero conveys in Latin with the expression *ex tempore officium* (*De Officiis* 3.32).[80] Cicero also draws on Hecaton's treatise on appropriate action, which in its sixth book discussed a series of dilemmas concerning the discovery of the *kathêkon* under "difficult" circumstances.[81] Given the many types of circumstance that may bear on a determination of appropriate action, Cicero's discussion is restricted to selected case studies. These draw on Greek sources but are also supplemented in many cases by Roman historical "examples" (*exempla*), in an attempt to convey more easily the ideas discussed to a Roman audience.

Consistently with its focus on practical ethics, Cicero's *De Officiis* thematizes a "comparison" (*comparatio*) and even an (apparent) "dispute" (*contentio*) dealing with courses of action that could be considered appropriate under specific circumstances. This topic is identified with the third category of Panaetius's division of the inquiry into the *kathêkon* which, according to Cicero's testimony, was neglected by Panaetius himself but taken up by his pupil Posidonius.[82] Cicero's discussion here points to cases where a course of action of a sort that is generally commendable has to be neglected for the sake of another action which is more commendable under particular given circumstances.[83] An example of such a seeming dispute concerning which action is appropriate is provided in another Stoic source: to tell the truth may seem to be in conflict with helping someone, as in the case of a doctor who lies in order to convince a patient to submit to a treatment which is necessary for his or her health.[84] The Stoics resolve this potential conflict by identifying what is *kathêkon* not on the basis of the truth or falsity of the statement involved but on the basis of the *intention* that its utterance serves. Thus, the Stoic ethical doxography which survives in Stobaeus (*Eclogai* 2 111.11–15 W.) reports that lying does not occur in telling a falsehood, but in telling the falsehood "in a deceiving way" (*diapseustikôs*) and in order to cheat one's neighbors.[85] The same passage maintains that the sage will sometimes avail himself of falsehoods, however "without assenting to them" (*aneu sunkatatheseôs*), in order to avoid self-deceit. Similarly, Cicero states that a wise man is not allowed to steal other people's resources in order to survive, *unless* by remaining alive he or she intends to confer a great benefit to his state or to the human community.[86] In this latter case, stealing is not reprehensible.

Cicero also discusses the "dispute" that may arise in the deliberations (of the non-sage) when choosing between a course of action which appears to be "virtuous" (*honestum*) and another one which seems "expedient" (*utile*). In presenting an alleged dispute between the Stoics Diogenes of Babylon and his pupil Antipater on the question whether the "expedient" and the "virtuous" course of action are in every case the same,[87] Cicero defends the view that it would not be appropriate for a seller of a house to conceal the house's faults from the potential buyers,[88] who have an interest in knowing this information, since that would be characteristic of people of a "wicked" intention (*malitiosi*) who make a profit from someone else's ignorance

(*De Officiis* 3.57).[89] Following the Stoics, Cicero concludes that a conflict between "the virtuous" and the
p. 456 "expedient" is only ↳ apparent and that the rule (*regula*) of the virtuous and the expedient courses of action should always be the same, leading to a single appropriate action in each case.[90]

Another case study from Cicero's *De Officiis* (1.32) illustrates the point that there is no real conflict among Stoic *kathêkonta*. Here the benefit ensuing to a friend on whose behalf we have promised to serve as an advocate in court is weighed against the loss incurred in the process by neglecting another course of action, that of attending to one's son who has, in the meantime, fallen seriously ill. The example clearly suggests that it is not contrary to the *kathêkon* to break one's promise to a friend on this occasion.[91] It furthermore suggests that there is only *one* appropriate action to be performed in this case, namely that of attending to the sick child. Cicero's additional remark at *De Officiis* 1.32 that the person to whom one had made the promise "would be failing in his *officium* if he complained that he had been abandoned" suggests further that no appropriate action has been omitted by the promisor in this case.[92] Thus, the fact that some courses of action that are generally considered appropriate are not appropriate *under particular circumstances* does not signify any real conflict among *kathêkonta*, nor any conflict in the soul of the sage. This again may imply that the sage's decision is a conjecture of the single course of action that the divine rational principle would prescribe under these particular circumstances.[93]

Finally, Cicero's *De Officiis* considers the character of practical deliberation.[94] Some passages in the work suggest that discovery of the *kathêkon* involves some kind of calculation. Thus, at *De Officiis* 1.59 we find the idea that we should become good "calculators of appropriate actions" (*ratiocinatores officiorum*). If the model is to accommodate other-regarding actions as well, the considerations that provide a basis for such calculations presumably must include aims that involve the human beings to whom an agent is related—for example, the preservation of human fellowship or of common utility, both standards of action to which Cicero frequently refers.[95] Cicero also uses the vocabulary of measurement in relation to the discovery of *kathêkonta*, stating at *De Officiis* 1.60 that the "calculation" which leads to the appropriate action necessarily should be supplemented by practice and experience (*usum ... exercitationem*). This implies sensitivity both to what nature generally commends for humans and to particular features of the agent's circumstance. Considerations along these lines suggest that the sort of deliberation leading to the discovery of the *kathêkon* does not admit for the Stoics of a narrow, universally applicable codification.[96] Suggestive too in this context is the Stoic idea of "reservation" (*hupexairesis*), according to which the sage will take into account in his or her deliberation not only expected outcomes but also unforeseen adversity (Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 115.7–9 W.).[97] Since deliberation is not tied to particular outcomes, the sage will never act contrary to rational desire, and will therefore experience no regret.[98]

Thanks in part to its prominence in Cicero's ethical treatises, the Stoic conception of the *kathêkon* exercised a considerable and lasting influence on later philosophical and literary traditions. Kant had access to *De Officiis* indirectly through the German translation and commentary of Christian Garve, which he read before the
p. 457 composition of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and he may well have formulated some of his ↳ ideas about moral duty under its influence.[99] The original Stoic notion, distinctive in its broad application to animals and plants no less than to human beings, came in time to be associated with the obligations appropriate to rational agents in particular, both anticipating and influencing later conceptions of duty and dutiful action.

Further Reading

A concise presentation of the Stoic *kathêkonta* in the context of Stoic ethics as a whole is provided in Inwood and Donini 1999 and Bett 2006. The standard definition of the *kathêkon* is discussed extensively in Tsekourakis 1974, Brennan 1996, Gourinat 2014 and, more recently, in Lorenz 2020. Visnjic 2021 offers new perspectives on the Stoic etymology and classifications of the *kathêkon*, as also on the way non-sages perform *kathêkonta*. For the role of the *kathêkon* in the context of the Stoic theory of action, Inwood 1985 remains the standard starting point. Relevant for the social dimension of *kathêkonta* and their application to human relationships, especially in Roman Stoicism, is Reydams-Schils 2005, whereas Ramelli 2011 discusses specifically the social *kathêkonta* in Hierocles. Barney 2003 lays out the problems related to understanding the deliberation of the Stoic sage. For an extensive discussion of different models of deliberation for the specification of the *kathêkon* in Stoic ethics, see chapter 12 and chapter 13 in Brennan 2005. Finally, Klein 2015 offers a new "epistemic" reading of the role that "preferred indifferents" play in the deliberation which is involved in the choice of *kathêkonta*.

Notes

1. *peri te tês prôtês aksias kai tôn prakseôn … protropôn te kai apotropôn* (DL 7.84).

2. DL 7.4 (for Zeno); ibid. 7.174 (for Cleanthes); ibid. 7.177 (for Sphaerus) and Plutarch, *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis* 1045e; ibid. 1047f (for Chrysippus).

3. *to kata tinas hêkein*. For a detailed discussion of Zeno's etymology of the *kathêkon*, see Visnjic 2021: 22–9.

4. For this understanding of the implications of the etymology, see also Cooper 1996: 269 and Lorenz 2020: 120.

5. The translation "appropriate" is chosen by Inwood 1985 and that of "incumbent" by Cooper 1996, whereas Brennan 2005 translates *kathêkon* by "befitting." Long and Sedley translate *kathêkon* by "proper function." For an understanding of the Stoic *kathêkon* as "duty," see Cooper 1996 and Visnjic 2021.

6. At least according to a narrow understanding of "duty," the term refers to an obligation we have, in relation to another person, to perform a particular action, such as the obligation which ensues from giving a promise. Some of the appropriate actions that Stoics identified, specific to certain roles or relations, may be deemed duties in that sense, such as the appropriate action related to keeping contracts or some of the appropriate actions related to the role of parent. One should however bear in mind that the Greek term applies to a wider range of human actions beyond the ones that one would characterize as duties in this strict sense. Indeed, as we shall see, it applies to non-human cases as well.

7. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of the primary sources cited are by the author.

8. *to akolouthon en zoê, ho prachthen eulogon apologian echei*, Stobaeus, *Eclogai* 2 85.14–15 W. (LS 59B) = *SVF* 1, 55.13–14.
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DL merely changes the order of the two parts of the definition; ↳ see 7.107 = *SVF* 1, 55.6–8. Notice, however, that Dorandi prints *proachthen* instead of *prachthen*; against this reading, see Lorenz 2020: 53.

9. *est autem officium, quod ita factum est, ut eius facti probabilis ratio reddi possit*.

10. Cf. Cicero, *Lucullus* 32.

11. It is also suggestive that Cicero mentions this Latin rendering of the Greek definition of the *kathêkon* in the context of his discussion of "intermediate appropriate actions" (*media officia*), which are discussed later in this chapter. An alternative formulation of the definition is provided by Cicero at *De Officiis* 1.8, where the *kathêkon* is also deemed an "intermediate" one: *medium autem officium id esse dicunt, quod cur factum sit, ratio probabilis reddi possit*. For the shift of the meaning of *eulogon* in the "New Academic" Arcesilaus, see Brennan 1996: 334. For a defense of the rendering of *eulogon* as "well-reasoned," see ibid. 328. On Arcesilaus, see further Allen, this volume.

12. This seems to be confirmed by another occurrence of "consistent" (*akolouthon*) in the Stoic sources, where it characterizes "a life which is consistent and in agreement with nature" (*zôên akolouthon … kai homologoumenên phusei*) (Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 75.9–10 W.), itself a description of "happiness" (*eudaimonia*). For an explanation of the "standard" definition of the *kathêkon* along similar lines, cf. LS, vol. 2: 365.

13. This is confirmed by the reference to "common nature" (*koinê phusis*) at DL 7.89. However, the relevance of cosmic nature for Stoic ethics has been contested in modern scholarship, see, e.g., Annas 1993: 159–79. On cosmic nature, see Powers, this volume.

14. *homologoumenôs tei phusei zên* (Zeno), *kat' empeirian tôn phusei sumbainontôn zên* (Chrysippus), DL 7.87 (LS 63C); cf. Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 76, 1–8 W (LS 63B), according to which the locution "with nature" in Zeno's formula was supplemented by Cleanthes, Zeno's first successor in the Stoa. See also Klein, this volume.

15. *akolouthôs têi phusei zên*, DL 7.88 (LS 63C); Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 62, 8 W.

16. DL 7.88; Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2.76, 9 W.

17. *to panta ta kathêkonta epitelounta zên*, DL 7.88; cf. Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 76, 10–11 W.

18. *Pace* Lorenz 2020: 64–5, who suggests that "to act" (*prattein*) in the "standard" definition does not apply exclusively to humans. It is suggestive, however, that in the case of the actions of nonrational animals, the source of Stobaeus switches from "to act" (*prattein*) to "to be active" (*energein*) (85.16 W.), which conveys the more general idea of "activity." *Apologismos* is used especially in the context of "giving a (justificatory) account" and *apologia* has the special meaning of a "defense speech" in court. Also suggestive is that the doxographer in Stobaeus specifies that "life" (*zôê*) in the standard definition should in the case of rational beings be understood in the sense of a *bios* (i.e., of a life form), a word applicable only to human beings (Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 85.17–18 W.). On this point, see also Tsekourakis 1974: 22 and Gourinat 2014: 20. Similarly, in the definition of *kathêkonta* as "those things that reason chooses to do" (*hosa logos hairei poiein*) (DL 7.108 = LS 59E), the Stoics employ the terminology of "choice" (*hairesis*) which is applicable only to rational action.

19. An example of the justification of appropriate action on the basis of the virtues, which ultimately depend on natural impulses, is provided, for example, at *De Officiis* 1.11–14, which draws on Panaetius.

20. See Brennan 1996: 330; 2005: 170. Cf. Lorenz 2020: 168–78.

21. See the notion of "middle duties," *infra*.

22. *diateinei kai eis ta aloga tôn zôôn*, *energei gar ti kakeina akolouthôs tê heautôn phusei* (Stobaeus *Eclogai* 85.15–17 W. = LS 59B).

p. 459 23. Cf. Inwood 1985: 201, Dyck 1996: 5 and Brennan 2005: 170. An example of the rational operation of nature is provided at DL 7.85, where the reason why (cosmic) nature employs *oikeiôsis* is shown on the basis of the notion of the "likely" (*eikos*).

24. *Energêma … tais kata phusin kataskeuais oikeion* DL 7.108 (LS 59C) = *SVF* 3.493.

25. For the link between *oikeiôsis* and *kathêkon*, see also Lorenz 2020: 132–6.

26. *primum est officium … ut se conservet in naturae statu* (Cicero *De Finibus* 3.20 = LS 59D).

27. The mechanism of *oikeiôsis* is described in the account of DL 7.85 (LS 57A) (= *SVF* 3.178), which goes back to Chrysippus's "On Ends" (*Peri Telôn*). A similar account of Stoic *oikeiôsis* is also given at Cicero's *De Finibus* 3.16. For an interpretation of *oikeiôsis* and its place in Stoic ethics, see Striker 1983 and Klein 2016. See also Klein, this volume.

28. See Cicero *De Finibus* 3.22 (LS 59D): *cum vero illa quae officia esse dixi proficiscantur ab initiis naturae necesse est ea ad haec referri ut recte dici possit omnia officia eo referri ut adipiscamur principia naturae.* See also Irwin, this volume, Kamtekar, this volume, and Klein, this volume.

29. Cicero seems to allude to the developmental stages in which the concept of the "good" (*honestum*) is acquired at *De Finibus* 3.20–1 (LS 59D).

30. There we find first a discussion of nutrition as the most fundamental function of the soul (*psuchê*) of all living things (*On the Soul* 2.415a20 ff.); this includes plants, which for Aristotle, in opposition to the Stoics, possess a soul. Subsequently Aristotle discusses perception and locomotion, functions that are characteristic of animals (ibid. 2.416b30 ff.). To these functions is added, in the case of human beings, reason, which can be both theoretical and practical (ibid. 3.427a 15ff.).

31. Translated by Long and Sedley.

32. Translated by Long and Sedley. For a similar progression of living forms starting with the plants and ending with human beings who use *logos* to select the things that are in accordance with their natural constitution, cf. the excerpt from the late Stoic Hierocles found in Stobaeus *Florilegium* 4.502.22–503.10 Hense.

33. For an analysis of the way "breath" (*pneuma*) in Stoicism accounts for the functions of all living forms, see Long 1982: 42–53.

34. See Kamtekar, this volume and Klein, this volume. Thus, all true assents to impressions that something is "appropriate" will issue in *kathêkonta*.

35. For example, in the definition of pain that survives in Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 90.14–16 W, the cause of pain is forming "a fresh opinion that an evil is present, in the face of which it is *appropriate* (*kathekei*) to contract." Here the *kathêkon* judgment, though motivating, appears to be false. See also Epictetus (*Diss*. 3.22.43), where the "impression of something advantageous or improper" (*phantasian lusitelous ê mê kathêkontos*) is necessary for any "rational desire" (*oregesthai*) or "impulse" (*horman*). Cf. *Diss*. 1.18.2. Similarly, at *Enchiridion* 42.1 Epictetus says that the one who wrongs someone "thinks that it is appropriate for him to do so" (*kathêkein autoi oiomenos poiei*). Cf. also Inwood 1985: 56; 148 and Brennan 2005: 175.

36. According to the Stoic Antipater such things have a "selective" value (*eklektikê axia*) (Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 83.13–15 W. = LS 58D). For "selection" as applied to *kathêkonta*, see, e.g., Cicero *De Finibus* 3.20 and Hierocles in Stobaeus *Florilegium* 4.502.22.

37. It is unclear whether *hairesis* excludes *eklogê*, or whether the impulses of the sage may be instances of both. For the discussion of *eklogê* and *hairesis*, see, e.g., Inwood 1985: 239 and Inwood and Donini 1999: 698.

p. 460 38. See Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 85.18–20 W.; ibid. 86.11–12 W.; Cicero *De Officiis* 1.8.

39. *pantas apechon tous arithmous* (Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 93.14–15 W. = LS 59 K). For a similar expression, cf. DL 7.100. For a Latin rendering of the expression see *De Officiis* 3.14: *omnes numeros habet*, cf. Dyck 1996: 514; for a different interpretation which understands the expression as borrowing from musical theory, see Long 1991.

40. See, e.g., Sextus Empiricus *M* 11.200 = *SVF* 3.516. For a discussion of the disposition of the Stoic sage, see Tsekourakis 1974: 48–60.

41. *katalêpsin asphalê kai ametaptôton hupo logou* (Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 73.20–1 W. = LS 41H); cf. DL 7.47.

42. Suggestive is a fragment of Chrysippus which survives in Stobaeus's *Florilegium* 5.906.18–907.5 Hense (LS 59I) = *SVF* 3.510, stating that "he who has maximally progressed performs *all* the appropriate actions in all ways (*hapanta pantôs*), omitting none. And he (*sc*. Chrysippus) says that his life is not yet happy, but that happiness supervenes on it when the intermediate actions acquire in addition the characteristics of stability and tenor and a peculiar sort of fixity (*pêksis*)," translation by Long and Sedley (with alterations). For a discussion of this passage, see Brennan 2005: 176–9.

43. *SVF* 3.136.19–21.Cf. Tsekourakis 1974: 27.

44. *pan to para to kathêkon en logikôi zôôi ginomenon*, Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 86.10–11 W. Cf. Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 93.31–3 W. which defines *hamartêma* as "something done contrary to correct reason or as some omission of an appropriate action by a rational creature," translation by Pomeroy (with alterations). This second sense of *hamartêma* is not acknowledged by Brennan 2005: 171.

45. See *Off*. 1.8: *medium autem officium id esse dicunt, quod cur factum sit, ratio probabilis reddi possit.* Cf. *Fin.* 3.14 and 3.59. See also *Fin.* 3.59: E*st quoddam commune officium sapientis et insipientis ex quo efficitur versari in iis quae media dicamus*. At *De Officiis* 3.14 "intermediate" appropriate actions are said to be "common" by means of the fact that many people have access to them, either through their intellectual capacities or their "progress" in learning: *ea communia sunt et late patent quae et ingenii bonitate multi assequuntur et progressione discendi*. See further Tsekourakis 1974: 24 and Visnjic 2021: 54–5.

46. Cf. LS, vol. 2: 366–7.

47. *to men aei katorthoun en hapasin hois prostithetai, to de hamartanein*, Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 99.7–8 W. Cf. ibid. 106.6 W. For the idea that there is "nothing between virtue and vice," see, e.g., DL 7.127 (LS 61I), and Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2.65.7 W (LS

61G). Cf. Cicero *De Finibus* 3.48.

48. *Hecatonem quidem Rhodium, discipulum Panaetii, video in iis libris, quos de officio scripsit Q. Tuberoni.* Cf. *De Officiis* 3.89.

49. See, e.g., DL 7.123; Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 75.8 W.; ibid. 109.17–18 W.; Cicero *De Finibus* 3.63; ibid. 3.65.

50. See, e.g., *De Officiis* 1.12: *Eademque natura vi rationis hominem conciliat homini et ad orationis et ad vitae societatem ingeneratque inprimis praecipuum quondam amorem in eos qui procreati sunt*. Cf. *De Finibus* 3.62 (LS 57F). For a discussion of the social aspect of "natural appropriation" (*oikeiôsis*) in Cicero and later Stoics, see Reydams-Schils 2005: 53–82.

51. E.g., DL 7.108 (LS 59E). Cf. Stobaeus *Eclogai* 2 94.8–17 W.; Cicero *De Finibus* 3.68.

52. See Cicero's answer to Atticus at *Ad Atticum* 16.14.3 with regard to the application of the *officium* to both public and private life. Cf. also *De Officiis* 1.124, where Cicero refers to the special *officia* of magistrates, citizens and "resident aliens." There is a fuller discussion of the "appropriate actions" of magistrates at ibid. 2.73–85.

p. 461 53. Thus, Cicero writes to Atticus in 44 BCE that he finished a work on appropriate action, so far as Panaetius goes, in two books, whereas Panaetius treated the same topics in three books: τὰ περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος, *quatenus Panaetius, absolvi duobus; illius tres sunt* (*Ad Atticum* 16.11.4). Later in the same letter, Cicero praises Panaetius's exposition (*de duobus primis praeclare disserit*). However, he is also keen to observe that despite his dependence on Panaetius, he is not performing the task of a mere translator, see *De Officiis* 2.60: *ut et hic ipse Panaetius, quem multum in his libris secutus sum non interpretatus.* Cf. also ibid. 3.7, where Cicero says that he followed Panaetius but also applied some "amendment" (*correctio*) to his work. Panaetius's treatise as a source for Cicero's *De officiis* is discussed by Dyck 1996: 17–29. Cf. Tsouni (2023) 44-48.

54. *cum haec inter se pugnare videantur, quo modo iudicandum sit* Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 16.11.4; cf. *De Officiis* 1.9; ibid. 3.7.

55. Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.7. Cf. ibid. 1.60. According to Dyck 1996: 76, Cicero's remarks aim at differentiating his treatment of *kathêkonta* in this inquiry from their "theoretical" treatment in the *De Finibus*. "Practical advice" (*praecepta*) seems to be in the Roman period a necessary constituent of treatises "on the appropriate action"; see, for example, the evidence from Seneca *Ep*. 95.45, referring to a lost treatise *Peri kathêkontos* by M. Brutus, in which he gives "many advice to parents, children and siblings" (*multa praecepta et parentibus et liberis et fratribus*). Seneca himself extensively discusses the value of "practical advice" (*praecepta*) and their relation to *officia* in *Ep.* 94 and 95. For an understanding of such *praecepta* as "rules" and an ensuing debate in scholarship, see Mitsis 1993 and Inwood 1999.

56. See, e.g., *De Officiis* 1.57.

57. *communis hominum inter homines naturalis commendatio*.

58. The early Stoic ideas on the "cosmic city" are discussed extensively in Vogt 2008: chapter 3.

59. See *De Officiis* 1.52. Even in this case, as Cicero puts it, one should assist without detriment to oneself.

60. See the references to the "fundamentals" of justice at *Off*. 1.20 and the example of the "drowning" sage (which draws on Hecato) at ibid. 3.90.

61. See Lecture 14 71.8–10 Hense: *ho ge philosophos didaskalos dêpou kai hêgemôn pantôn tois anthrôpois esti tôn kata phusin anthrôpôi prosêkontôn*. For a fuller argumentation of how the *prosêkon* is grounded in the nature of each animal, see Lecture 17 88.14–90.1 Hense.

62. *tis ho philosophôi prosêkôn poros,* Lecture 11 Hense.

63. Lecture 14 73.6–10 Hense.

64. A (lost) treatise by Cleanthes with the title *On the Thesis that Virtue is the same in Man and in Woman* may have been one of the sources of influence for Musonius, see DL 7.175 = *SVF* 3.253–4.

65. See Epictetus *Enchiridion* 30.1: *ta kathêkonta hôs epipan tais schesesi parametreitai*. Cf. also Epictetus *Diss*. 4.4.16. and ibid. 4.12.16. Also, Seneca defines *officia* with regard to relationships at *De Beneficiis* 3.18.1: *officium esse filii, uxoris, earum personarum quas necessitudo suscitat et ferre opem iubet.*

66. For an enumeration of relationships with regard to *kathêkonta*, see also Epictetus *Diss*. 3.2.4.

67. Epictetus *Diss*. 2.10.11: *hekaston tôn toioutôn onomatôn eis epilogismon erchomenon hupografei ta oikeia erga*.

68. See Ramelli 2011: 541.

p. 462 69. On appropriate actions toward the gods, cf. Seneca *Ep*. 95.47–50; on other relations, cf. Stobaeus *Florilegium* 4.671.4–6 Hense. Such a ranking of "degrees" of relationship also corresponds to Cicero's *De Officiis* 1.160. Cf. DL 7.120.

70. Stobaeus *Florilegium* 4.641.3–7; ibid. 4.643.5–7 and 643.22–644.2 Hense.

71. Stobaeus *Florilegium* 4.671.7–672.6 Hense (LS 57G).

72. Ibid. 4.672.16–17: *aphairesetai mên gar ti tês eunoias to kath' haima diastêma pleon.*

73. Ibid. 4.673.2–11 Hense.

74. Stobaeus *Florilegium* 4.502.8–503.10 Hense. On the importance of marriage for the later Stoics, cf. also Antipater's fragment from a treatise "on marriage" (*peri gamou*), in which he discusses marriage as "one of the most necessary and primary *kathêkonta*" in Stobaeus *Florilegium* 4.508.2–3 Hense. For a discussion of this "conventional" aspect of Stoic ethics, see also Brennan 2005: 210. For the similarities between the approach of Antipater and that of Hierocles (and Musonius), see Reydams-Schils 2005: 147–59 and Ramelli 2009: lxxv–lxxvi.

75. *têi par' autês kataskeuei sumphônon tên eklogên chrê ginesthai tôn kathêkontôn*, Stobaeus *Florilegium* 4.502.21–2 Hense.

76. The idea that in our pursuit of a life which is "according to nature," our human nature should be supplemented by our "individual" nature is introduced at *De Officiis* 1.107. On the "role" (*persona*) theory developed there, see Gill 1988.

77. Cicero *De Officiis* 1.112.

78. See *De Officiis* 1.31; 1.115; cf. ibid. 1.59, where it is stated that the degrees of relationships and those of circumstances are not the same*: ita non idem erunt necessitudinum gradus qui temporum.* Visnjic 2021: 42–4 however understands *peristasis* more narrowly as "emergency/crisis/dire circumstance."

79. *peri tou kata peristasin kathêkontos*, *Ad Atticum* 16.11.4.

80. Posidonius's treatise is referred to explicitly also at *De Officiis* 1.159 and ibid. 3.8.

81. *De Officiis* 3.89–92.

82. See *Ad Atticum* 16.11.4 and *De Officiis* 1.152. Cf ibid. 1.58. See also *De Officiis* 1.7: *num quod officium, aliud alio maius sit.*

83. *De Officiis* 3.95: *Sic multa quae honesta natura videntur esse, temporibus fiunt non honesta.*

84. For the example, see Philo *On the Cherubim* 15 = LS 59H.

85. On the role of intention for judging the *kathêkon*, cf. *Seneca Ep*. 95.43.

86. *De Officiis* 3.30.

87. On different attempts to reconstruct the "original" debate between the Stoic Diogenes and his pupil Antipater, see Annas 1989 and Schofield 1999.

88. The same example was used in Carneades's speech against justice (on which the third book of Cicero's *De Re Publica* drew) according to the testimony of Lactantius *Inst. Div*. V, 16, 5–13.

89. Cf. *De Officiis* 3.67; ibid. 3.72.

90. *De Officii*s 3.74*: eadem utilitatis quae honestatis est regula.*

91. On the appropriateness of violating a promise under particular circumstances, see also *De Officiis* 3.92–5. For a discussion of promise-keeping in the *De officiis*, see also Woolf 2007: 321–30.

92. *magisque ille, cui promissum sit, ab officio discedat si se destitutum queratur.*

93. Cf. Klein 2015: 270–1.

94. It is suggestive that the word *deliberatio* and its cognates are very prominent in Cicero's discussion, see, e.g., *De Officiis* 1.9 and 3.37.

p. 463 95. See, e.g., *De Officiis* 1.31 on *communis utilitas*. Accommodating "other-regarding" concerns into a deliberation based on "indifferents" has been regarded as a problematic aspect of Stoic ethics, see Brennan 2005: 205.

96. The difficulty of formulating such a single rule or principle of Stoic deliberation is thematized in Barney 2003. See also Inwood 1999, Woolf 2007, who refers to the "particularist" outlook of the Stoic theory of *kathêkonta* on the basis of Cicero's *De Officiis*, and Klein 2015: 274–5.

97. Cf. Inwood 1985: 121.

98. On the absence of regret in the case of the sage, see, e.g., Seneca *De Beneficiis* 4.34.4. Cf. Mitsis 1993: 307.

99. See Reich 1939: 447. For a discussion of Kant's access to Stoic sources, cf. also Visnjic 2021: chapter 5. For the identification of a number of structural parallelisms between Stoic and Kantian positions, see Doyle and Torralba 2016.

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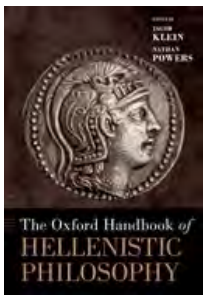
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CHAPTER

20 Fate, Cause, and Action in Stoicism

Susan Sauvé Meyer

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Abstract

The Stoic doctrine of fate (*heimarmenē*) is significantly different from modern forms of determinism, and the objections its critics raised about human agency are correspondingly different from the challenges faced by compatibilists today. Stoic fate is not a deterministic sequence of events, but a complex system of mutual influence in which the bodies that constitute the cosmos have effects on each other. No cause is exempt from such external influence, and human agency is no exception. The antecedent causes that give rise to our actions, on the Stoic view, are external bodies that make an impression on us, rather than sets of antecedent conditions that determine our actions. When critics of Chrysippus objected that our actions, if fated, would not be up to us, they registered a concern about external influence rather than the more familiar modern worry about antecedent determination.

Keywords: fate, cause, causal nexus, determinism, compatibilism, Stoic, Chrysippus, antecedent causes, agency

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One of the most famous doctrines of the ancient Stoics is that everything happens by fate (DL 7.149), a thesis that elicited fierce opposition in antiquity.[1] One of the objections the Stoics faced was that their thesis of fate had problematic and unacceptable consequences for human action.[2] In particular, it would entail that our actions are not "up to us" in the way that our practices of praise, blame, and punishment presuppose. The Stoic response to this objection was unapologetic and uncompromising: our actions can be both fated and up to us. On this basis, the Stoics are considered the first self-conscious compatibilists in the Western philosophical tradition. It is worth noting, however, that compatibilism today is construed as a thesis about causal determinism; there are important differences between the Stoic thesis of fate and modern formulations of causal determinism, and these in turn stem from differences between Stoic and modern conceptions of

causation. In this chapter, we will see that the incompatibilist objections faced by the early Stoics are directed at precisely the features that distinguish Stoic fate from modern formulations of determinism. It is only in response to the Stoics' later critics that anything recognizably like the contemporary debate over compatibilism begins to emerge.

1. Fate as a Causal Nexus

Let us begin by considering what the Stoics have in mind by "fate" (*heimarmenê*; Latin, *fatum*). They often describe it in theological or cosmological terms. For example, Chrysippus variously describes fate as "the *logos* of the world" or "the *logos* in the providence governing the cosmos" or "the *logos* in accordance with which past things have come to be, [present] things are coming-to-be, and future things will come-to-be" (LS 55M). It is
p. 466 the "*logos* of Zeus," which governs every state and process in the universe ↳ (LS 55R). Indeed, "fate" and "Zeus" are alternative names for god, the seminal *logos* that generates the cosmos and governs its transformations from beginning to end in the endless cycles of eternal recurrence (DL 7.135; Cicero *Nat. D.* 1.39; LS 46G).

Logos in these contexts is one of the two fundamental principles (*archai*) of the universe: that which acts (*to poioun*), and that which is acted upon (*to paschoun*):[3]

> **T1** [The Stoics] think that there are two principles of the universe, that which acts and that which is acted upon. That which is acted upon is unqualified substance (*ousia*), i.e. matter (*hulê*); that which acts is the reason (*logos*) in it, i.e. god.
>
> (DL 7.134 = LS 44B)[4]

The active principle, variously described as *logos* or "god," is also identified as "cause." Thus, Seneca describes the two cosmic principles as "cause and matter" (*causam et materiam*, *Ep.* 65.2 = LS 55E). Accordingly, the Stoics characterize fate as the cause (*aitia*) of the cosmos (LS 55M3).[5]

The causality of the divine *logos* is distributed throughout the universe as a corporeal *pneuma* (breath) that permeates every body in the universe, literally holding each body together, endowing it with the properties that individuate it from other bodies, and giving it movement (LS 45H, 48C1).[6] To the extent that anything within the cosmos is a cause, it is because it is permeated with a portion of the divine *logos*. Thus, Zeno identified the *logos* in each individual cause (*logos aitiou*) with the cosmic *aitia* of which it is a portion (LS 55A5).[7] Accordingly, the Stoics speak of the divine *logos* and "cause" both in the singular—as the active principle of the universe—and also in the plural:

> **T2** The primary fire [sc. Zeus] is as it were the seed which possesses the *logoi* and causes of what has come-to-be, is coming-to-be, or will come-to-be. The interconnection (*epiplokê*) and following (*akolouthia*) of these is fate …
>
> (Eusebius *Praep. Ev.* 15.14.2 = LS 46G2)

Here the Stoics characterize fate not as the singular divine *logos* or cause, but as the "interconnection (*epiplokê*) and following (*akolouthia*)" of the plurality of causes into which the divine *logos* is distributed.

This characterization of fate as an "interconnection" and "following" of causes goes back at least as far as Chrysippus. Aulus Gellius reports that Chrysippus, in *On Providence* Book 4, writes that:

> **T3** Fate [is] a certain natural everlasting ordering (*suntaxin*) of the whole: one set of things following (*epakolouthountôn*) and involved with another, with the interconnection (*epiplokês*) an inviolable one.
>
> (Aulus Gellius *NA* 7.2.3 = LS 55K)

Among later Stoic characterizations of fate, the interconnection (*epiplokê*) of causes is characterized as a string (*heirmos*, Latin: *series*).[8] Thus, for example:

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> **T4** The Stoics say that fate is a string (*heirmon*) of causes, that is, an inescapable ordering and concatenation (*episundesin*).
>
> (Aetius *Plac*. 1.28.4 = LS 55J)

> **T5** By "fate" I mean what the Greeks call *heimarmenên*, that is, an ordering and string of causes (*ordinem seriemque causarum*), since it is the connection of cause to cause (*causae causa nexa*) which out of itself produces everything.
>
> (Cicero *Div*. 1.125 = LS 55L1)

While **T4** uses the Greek term *episundesis* ("concatenation"), rather than *epiplokê* ("interconnection," which we find in **T2** and **T3**), the terms differ little in meaning and either is well captured by the "connection of cause to cause" that in **T5** is characterized as "an ordering and string of causes." We may conclude that fate, as the Stoics conceived of it, is an interconnection of causes. Taking our cue from Cicero's Latin in **T5** (*causae causa nexa*), we may refer to it as a causal nexus.

2. Stoic Causal Relations

To appreciate what the Stoics have in mind by this causal nexus, we must understand their conception of causality: what sorts of things are causes, and how is one cause connected to another? Some care and precision are in order here, as Stoic causal notions are significantly different from ones we are familiar with today. For example, it is common today to conceive of causes as events that give rise to other events: as when a lightning strike causes a forest fire.[9] But the Stoics do not construe causality as a relation between events. Rather, they construe it as an interaction between bodies. As Sextus Empiricus reports:

> **T6** The Stoics say that every cause is a body which becomes the cause to a body of something incorporeal. For instance, the scalpel, a body, becomes the cause to the flesh, a body, of the incorporeal predicate "being cut." And again, the fire, a body, becomes a cause to the wood, a body, of the incorporeal predicate, "being burnt."
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *Math*. 9.211 = LS 55B)

On this schema, causality involves two bodies: one of them the cause, the other the body affected by the cause. The relation between these bodies replicates the agent-patient relation between the two cosmic principles: divine *logos* and unqualified matter. Causality construed in this way is a relation in which one body (the cause) has an effect on another body (the locus of the effect). Note that the effect is a third thing, distinct from either of these bodies, and is not itself a body. It is rather something "predicated" of the patient body, and as such it is

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"incorporeal." In the example of **T6**, "being cut" is not a body, but ↳ something predicated of a body, the flesh. Thus, causality, for the Stoics, is a three-term relation which may be captured in the following locution:

> **The standard Stoic causal schema:** Body A is the cause to Body B of incorporeal C.

Given the two core tenets of Stoic causal theory—that causes are bodies, and that effects are incorporeal (LS 55A1, 55C, 55G)—it follows that, as far as the Stoics are concerned, an effect cannot be a cause and a cause cannot be an effect.[10] So when Stoics call fate a "string of causes" or a "connection of cause to cause," they cannot be thinking of an iterated sequence of cause and effect (Event 1 brings about Event 2, which in turn brings about Event 3, etc.). While such a sequence of events may be what many philosophers today have in

mind as a causal chain, it cannot be what the Stoics have in mind when they describe fate as a *heirmos* of causes.

What, then, is the relation of "cause to cause" invoked in the Stoic conception of fate?

Clement of Alexandria gives us an important clue:

> **T7** Causes are not causes *of* each other, but they are causes *to* each other … The stones in the arch are causes *to* each other of the predicate "remaining," but they are not causes *of* each other, and the teacher and the pupil are causes to each other of the predicate "making progress." Things are said to be causes to each other sometimes of the same effects, as the merchant and the retailer are causes to each other of making a profit; but sometimes of different effects, as in the case of the knife and the flesh; for the knife is the cause to the flesh of being cut, while the flesh is the cause to the knife of cutting.
>
> (Clement *Stromata* 8.9.30.1–3 = LS 55D)

Clement here makes a distinction between being a "cause to" something (*aitios* + dative) and being a "cause of" something (*aitios* + genitive). Recall that both expressions occur in the standard Stoic causal schema in **T6**: "Body A is the cause *to* Body B *of* incorporeal C." The "cause of" relation holds between a cause and its incorporeal effect:

> Body A is the *cause of* incorporeal C.

The "cause to" relation, by contrast, holds between one body and another:

> Body A is the *cause to* Body B.

We have seen that the "cause of" relation cannot be what links cause to cause in the Stoic causal nexus (since incorporeals cannot be causes). But there is no barrier to the "cause to" locution serving as that link. While Stoic causal notions do not allow for an iterated sequence of cause and effect, they do allow for an iterated sequence of causal influence that can be expressed in the "cause to" locution: Body 1 is the cause to Body 2, which is in turn the cause to Body 3, and so on.

p. 469 Of course, Clement's explicit focus in **T7** is not with iterated, but reciprocal, causal influence: the stones in the arch that hold each other in place, the merchant and the retailer who engage in a mutually beneficial transaction, the teacher and the student who bring out the best in each other. He gives examples where A is the cause to B of some effect, and B is also the cause to A of some effect. In such cases, he says, A and B are "causes to each other" rather than "of each other." Clement's focus on reciprocal influence has suggested to some interpreters that the three-place causal schema reported by Sextus in **T6** is incomplete or misleading. Thus, Totschnig has concluded that, for the Stoics, when A is the cause to B of some C, it is also the case that B is the cause to A of some D.[11] For similar reasons, Vogt has proposed that when Body A is the cause to Body B of C, both Body A and Body B are active in the production of C. She proposes that for the Stoics, it is only at the cosmic level that the standard causal schema captures the whole causal story; only in the case of the divine *pneuma* acting on undifferentiated substance is Body B purely passive. When one *pneuma*-imbued and differentiated body acts on another, both Body A and Body B are active in the production of C.[12]

We need not construe **T7** along these lines. Both Totschnig and Vogt require us to take its opening statement to mean:

> (i) For all causes A and B, if A is a cause to B, then B is a cause to A.

However, a better paraphrase of that statement is:

> (ii) In cases of reciprocal causation, A and B are causes *to each other*, rather than causes *of each other*.

Clement's point is to clarify the kind of causal relation in which one cause can stand to another. This is precisely what we need in order to identify the "connection of cause to cause" (**T5**) that the Stoics identify with fate. Indeed, it is possible that Clement's clarification is intended to address just such a question. What matters for our present purposes is that **T7** identifies a bona fide Stoic causal relation that can hold between causes: one cause can have an effect on another. We may therefore entertain the hypothesis that this is the relation in which "cause is connected to cause" (*causae causa nexa*) in the "interconnection" (*epiplokê*) of causes that the Stoics identify as fate.[13]

In §3, we will see that the Stoics consider such relations of causal influence to be a ubiquitous feature of the cosmos, and that they identify that system of influences with fate.

3. Cosmic Sympathy

It is a core teaching of Stoic natural philosophy that the various bodies that comprise the cosmos are influenced by each other. According to their doctrine of *sumpatheia*, the disparate elements of the cosmos are related in a
p. 470 complex system of mutual interaction.[14] ↳ Some of the interactions are local: "when some strings of a lyre are struck, [and] others resonate" (Cicero *Div*. 2.33). Others involve the influence of celestial over terrestrial phenomena, such as the effect of the moon on the tides and of solstices on the cycles of plant and animal reproduction (Cicero *Div*. 2.33–4; *Nat. D*. 2.50; Augustine *De Civ. D.* 5.2). Also invoked are the effects of climate on intelligence and personality (Cicero *Fat*. 7–8), and the effects of the weather on animal behavior, as when the flight of a heron signals a coming storm (*Div*. 1.14). Reports of the Stoic doctrine emphasize the reciprocity of the relations of influence within the cosmos: the air and earth affected by the celestial bodies in the rain cycle in turn influence animal life, perceptions, and activity; the animals and plants in turn affect the air, and so indirectly affect the celestial bodies (Cicero *Nat. D*. 2.83, 2.118).

The scope and reciprocity of these "sympathies" is so extensive as to endow the cosmos with the unity of a living organism, according to the Stoics (Sextus Empiricus *Math*. 9.78–9; Cicero *Nat. D*. 2.82).[15] Plotinus, moreover, explicitly invokes the internal sympathies of a living organism—whose parts are "interconnected with each other, acting and being acted upon" (*pros allêla sumplokê, poiêsin te kai peisin*—Plotinus *En.* 3.1.4.7)—to elucidate the "interconnection" (*sumplokê*) that the Stoics identify with fate.[16] It therefore makes sense to suppose that the complex system of causal interactions invoked in the doctrine of sympathy is (or is a part of) the "connection of cause to cause" that the Stoics identify as fate. Thus, we have independent support for the hypothesis that the causes in the Stoic *heirmos* are bodies connected to each other by relations of causal influence.

4. Antecedent Causes

A passage in the treatise on fate by Alexander of Aphrodisias, to which we now turn, confirms that the Stoic doctrine of fate, no less than the doctrine of cosmic sympathy, was deployed to argue for the unity of the cosmos. It also makes clear that there is an important temporal dimension to the causal relations that, in their view, unify the cosmos: the causes in question are "antecedent causes." Alexander expounds the Stoic position as follows (LS 55N):[17]

> **T8** [The Stoics] say that since the world is a unity which includes all existing things in itself and is governed by a living, rational, intelligent nature, the government of existing things which it possesses is an everlasting one, proceeding in the manner of an orderly string (*kata heirmon tina kai taxin*).

(191.30–192.1)

T9 [a] Earlier things become ***causes to*** those that come after them, and in this manner all things are bound together. [b] Neither does anything come-to-be in [the cosmos] such that there is not
p. 471 something else that absolutely follows ↳ (*epakolouthein*) it and is bound to it as to a cause; [c] nor can any of the later things be severed from what came before [*tôn progegonotôn*] so that it does not follow (*akolouthein*) one of them as if bound fast to it. [d] Rather, for everything that comes-to-be there is something else that follows it (*epakolouthein*), bound fast to it of necessity as to a cause, and [e] everything that comes-to-be has something prior to which it is bound as to a cause.

(192.1–8)

T10 For nothing in the cosmos is or comes-to-be without a cause—since nothing in it is separated and severed from what came before [*tôn progegonotôn*]. The cosmos would be torn asunder and disintegrate, no longer a unity conducted by a unitary order and management, if someone were to introduce motion without a cause—which is introduced if it is not the case that all things that are or come-to-be have antecedent causes [*aitia progegonota*] to which they are bound by necessity … The government of the whole, being of this sort, extends clearly and without interruption from infinity to infinity.

(192.8–17)

T11 In setting out the difference which exists between causes, they list a swarm of causes … but, given this plurality of causes, they say that it is equally true of them all that it is impossible, where all the same circumstances obtain with respect to the cause and that to which it is the cause, that a result which does not ensue on one occasion should ensue on another. For if this happened, there would be uncaused motion (*anaition tina kinêsin*).

(Alexander of Aphrodisias *Fat*. 192.17–25)

This continuous exposition of Stoic doctrine begins in **T8** by invoking the causal *heirmos*, which it elucidates in **T9** by invoking antecedent causes. In **T10** we are told that if this state of affairs should cease to obtain, there would be "motion without a cause" and the unity of the cosmos would be undone. **T11** derives the denial of uncaused motion from what is recognizable as a thesis of causal determinism: given the total causal circumstances that obtain at a given time, only one thing can result (*sumbainein*).[18]

It is in **T9** and **T10** that antecedent causes are explicitly invoked. It may be tempting for modern readers to identify those antecedent causes with the determining conditions invoked in **T11**. But this would be a mistake, for Alexander's formulation in **T11** makes it explicit that those determining conditions encompass more than the cause. The conditions, as enumerated there, include at least three items: the cause, "that to which it is the cause," and other "circumstances." Only the first of these is the cause, and Alexander's invocation of "the cause and that to which it is the cause" (192.23) indicates that in **T11** he is still operating with the Stoic locution "A is the cause to B."

Indeed, **T9** uses this "cause to" locution to characterize the antecedent causes that it invokes. The passage opens by stating that the cosmos is bound together in virtue of the fact that

p. 472 [a] earlier things are "causes to" later things.

The items that stand in this causal relation are vaguely specified in **T9** as what "come to be" (*gignetai*).[19] They include causes, as in [b] and [c], which for the Stoics must be bodies. The same goes for the objects of the "cause to" relation in [a], since on the standard Stoic causal schema this is a relation between bodies. In **T10**, the motion or change (*kinêsis*) that "comes to be" is most likely not a body, but an incorporeal, according to the

Stoics.[20] As such it would play the role of C in the standard schema. What "comes to be" in **T9** and **T10** therefore includes all three relata of the standard schema: Body A is the cause to Body B of incorporeal C.

Alexander proceeds to unpack thesis [a] into two pairs of complementary theses:[21]

[b]	There is nothing for which there is not some [sc. later] thing that is "bound to it as to a cause";
[c]	there is nothing that is not "bound to" some earlier thing as to a cause.
[d]	Everything has some [sc. later] thing that is "bound to it" as to a cause;
[e]	everything is "bound" to some earlier thing as to a cause.

These four statements amount to two complementary claims about antecedent causes:

Thesis 1	Everything is an antecedent cause [b, d]
Thesis 2	Everything has an antecedent cause [c, e]

Since the causes invoked in [a] are "causes to," and since and [b] through [e] are intended to elucidate [a], we should expect the causes invoked in [b] through [e] also to be "causes to." The "cause to" relation, we have seen, is the one that holds between Body A and Body B in the standard Stoic schema. Thus, we should expect the antecedent causes in **T9** to be playing the role of A in the standard Stoic causal schema: Body A is the cause to Body B of incorporeal C.

One might object that this construal of the antecedent causes in **T9** fails to account for the fact that according to [b], [c], and [d] the antecedent causes are "followed" by the things to which they are causes.[22] Isn't "following" a relation between successive events? Not necessarily. It makes perfect sense to say that one body follows another, as when I follow you along the path. When A is the cause to B of C, B can intelligibly be said to "follow" A. The objector might respond by noting that in **T9** and **T10** the "following" is alternatively described as "being bound fast to" the antecedent cause. Doesn't this invoke the necessitating relation between the determining conditions of **T11** and what results from them, in which case those determining conditions would be the antecedent cause? No, for we have already seen that this cannot be the right way to construe **T11**. In any case, "binding" is a relation that can hold between bodies, as when Odysseus is bound to the mast of his ship. We may conclude that these objections do not require us to abandon our reading of **T9**, on which antecedent causes play the role ↳ of A in the standard Stoic causal schema in which Body A is the cause to Body B of incorporeal C.

But in what sense can Body A be an "antecedent" cause? When the scalpel is the cause to the flesh of being cut, it exists at the same time as the flesh, and will outlast the cutting. So, in what sense can such causality be antecedent? Here a suggestion by Susanne Bobzien is helpful.[23] When Body A is the cause to Body B of C, the cause strictly speaking is not "Body A" but "Body A acting *at a particular time*." If the time during which A is acting on B is prior to (or ends before) the time during which predicate C belongs to B, then A would be the *antecedent* cause to B of C. In a Stoic example that we will consider in more detail in §6, the man who pushes a cylinder, and thus starts it rolling down a slope, is the *antecedent* cause of the cylinder's motion. The pushing

precedes at least part of the cylinder's rolling, so the man is the antecedent cause to the cylinder of rolling. Antecedent causes, on this construal, conform to the standard causal schema: Body A is the *antecedent* cause to Body B of incorporeal C.[24]

As we turn now to consider the incompatibilist objection faced by the early Stoics, we will see that antecedent causes, so construed, are the focus of the objection.

5. The Early Debate over Whether Fated Actions Are Up to Us

In *De Fato* 40–5, Cicero reports an incompatibilist argument directed against the early Stoics, along with Chrysippus's reply. The objection focuses on **Thesis 2** of **T9**—that everything has an antecedent cause—and it infers from this that our actions are not up to us. We will see that, as in **T9** and **T10**, the antecedent causes invoked in Cicero's text are bodies exerting influence on other bodies. The incompatibilist worry is *not* that antecedent events determine our actions, but that external bodies make us act in the way we do.

As Cicero reports the opponents' argument:[25]

> **T12** They argued as follows. "[A] If all things come about by fate, all things come about by an antecedent cause. [B] And if impulses do, so too do those things consequent upon impulse. And therefore so too do assentings. [C] But if the cause of impulse is not located in us (*sita in nobis*), impulse itself too is not in our power. [D] And if this is so, neither [are] those things which are brought about by impulse in our power (*sita in nobis*).[26] [E] So, neither assentings nor actions are in our power. And from this it follows that neither praise nor blame nor honours nor punishments are just." [F] But since this is wrong, they think that the conclusion can persuasively be drawn that it is not the case that all things that come about do so by fate.
>
> (Cicero *Fat.* 40)

p. 474 While a number of details in this passage pose interpretive difficulties, at least the following points are clear about the opponents' argument. First of all, it has the form of a reductio ad absurdum. In [A] it infers from the doctrine of fate a consequence that we can recognize as **Thesis 2** from **T9**: "everything has an antecedent cause." **Thesis 2** is then applied in [B] through [D] to the case of human action, yielding the objectionable conclusion in [E] that our actions are not "in our power" in the way that moral assessment requires. In [F] the opponents take the objectionable conclusion to be grounds to reject the Stoic thesis of fate.

It is also clear that the opponents are appealing to a recognizably Stoic theory of action, according to which actions are the expression of "impulse" (*hormê*), and impulse is a response to an "impression" or "appearance" (*phantasia*, Latin: *visum*). In non-rational animals, the Stoics claim, the transition from impression to impulse is unmediated, but in humans the impression must be assented to before action results (LS 53A, 53Q, 53S). On this standard Stoic analysis, human actions arise from an internal psychological process with the following stages or components.[27]

> **Psychological processing that issues in action:**
>
> impression → assent → impulse

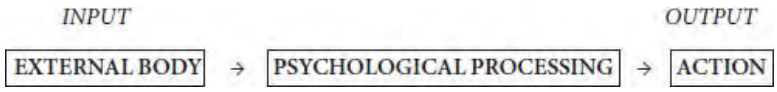
In [B], the objectors appear to have reversed the order of assent and impulse; however, this detail need not concern us, for the order is not important to their argument.[28] Rather, they focus on the external cause that initiates the psychological process and complain that *it* is not in our control. While they do not explicitly say that this cause is the source of the impression, this is evidently what Chrysippus takes them to have in mind. When responding to the objector, he concedes that

> **T13** it is not possible for assent to occur without being aroused by an external force (*nulla vi extrinsecus excitata*), for it is necessary that assenting should be caused by an impressor (*viso commoveri*).[29]
>
> (Cicero *Fat*. 42)

He repeats the concession a few lines later:

> **T14** an impressor (*visum*) when it strikes will, it is true, impress and, as it were, stamp its appearance on the mind (*imprimet … et quasi signabit in animo suam speciem*).
>
> (Cicero *Fat*. 43)

The important point for our purposes is that Chrysippus takes the opponents in **T12** to be appealing to the standard Stoic psychology of action on which something external to an agent (the impressor) initiates a
p. 475 psychological process that gives rise to action.[30] In ↳ other words, an external object provides the input that triggers the internal processing of which the action is the output:



What is important to the objectors in **T12** is not the *order* of the elements within the psychological process (e.g., whether impulse precedes assent), but the fact that something external to the agent and outside of her control initiates the process.

Before turning to consider Chrysippus's response to the objectors' argument, let us note that the causal relation crucial to the objection—between the external body and the agent in whom it elicits an impression—conforms to the standard Stoic causal schema in which one body (the external impressor) has an effect on another body (the agent). For example, suppose seeing an apple gives me the impression "here is something for me to eat":

Body A	an apple
is the cause to	
Body B	the perceiver
of	
Incorporeal C	having an impression, e.g., that "here's something for me to eat."

The passivity of the perceiver (Body B) vis-à-vis the external impressor (Body A) is captured by Sextus:

> **T15** Impulse and assent and cognition are alterations of the ruling part [i.e. the mind], but they differ from impression in that the latter is our passivity (*peisis*) and disposition (*diathesis*), while the others are much rather cases of activity (*energeiai*).
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *Math*. 7.237)[31]

The specific kind of impression that an impressor makes on us will of course depend on our character (*diathesis*) and other contents of our mind.[32] If I think the apple belongs to you, or if I detest the taste of apples,

the apple will not strike me as something to eat. This point will be important in Chrysippus's response to the objector's argument. For now, we may note that in the debate between Chrysippus and his opponents, both sides agree that the psychological process that that issues in action is initiated by a body that is external to and acts on the agent. This external body—not a set of determining conditions of the sort invoked by Alexander in **T11**— is the "antecedent cause" that is the focus of the objection.[33]

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6. Chrysippus Responds to the Incompatibilist

We have seen that the *reductio* argument leveled against the Stoic theory of fate in **T12** starts with two doctrines that the Stoics accept. The first is that the thesis of fate entails that everything has an antecedent cause. The second is that the antecedent causes of our actions are external objects that make an impression on us and thereby initiate the psychological process that issues in action. The core of the opponents' argument, in [B] through [E], is that the antecedent cause of an action is outside of the agent and not in the agent's power, and that therefore the action is not in the agent's power.

Chrysippus responds that this inference is invalid. The principle on which the inference depends is false for the kinds of antecedent causes invoked by the thesis of fate:

> **T16** "For," [Chrysippus] said, "some causes are perfect and principal, others auxiliary and proximate"; and for this reason, when we say that everything comes about by fate through antecedent causes, we do not want this to be understood as "through perfect and principal causes," but as "through auxiliary and proximate causes." And so he meets the argument, which I set out a short while ago, as follows. "If all things come about by fate it does indeed follow that all things come about by causes that precede them, but these are not perfect and principal causes, rather auxiliary and proximate ones. And [even] if these themselves are not in our power, it does not follow that impulse too is not in our power. This would follow, if we said that all things come about through perfect and principal causes, so that, since those causes are not in our power, [impulse] too would not be in our power."
>
> (Cicero *Fat*. 41)

Chrysippus here does three things. First, he draws a distinction between two types of causes: "perfect and principal" and "auxiliary and proximate." Second, he claims that the antecedent causes invoked by the Stoics in their thesis of fate are only of the latter type. Third, he claims that the causal regress principle presupposed by the opponents is true only for causes of the former type. That principle, which licenses the inferences in [C] through [E] in **T12**, may be articulated as follows.

> **The opponents' causal regress principle:** if the cause of X is not in my power, then X is not in my power.

Chrysippus allows that this principle is true only if the cause is "perfect and principal." However, when the Stoics agree that

> everything happens by fate (**the thesis of fate**)

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entails that

> everything has an antecedent cause (**Thesis 2**: the thesis of antecedent causes),

the antecedent causes in question are only "auxiliary and proximate."

Chrysippus does little to elucidate the difference between "perfect and principal" and "auxiliary and proximate" causes, beyond providing some examples, to which we will turn shortly. Later Stoics are reported to have distinguished many different kinds of causes—"a swarm of causes" (**T11**)—and these distinctions were adopted and developed by later thinkers. However, it is not obvious that the distinction Chrysippus invokes is captured in any of those later taxonomies.[34] As a result, our best course is to rely instead on Chrysippus's own application of his distinction.

To illustrate the difference between these two types of causes, and to support his claim that the antecedent causes of actions are only auxiliary and proximate, Chrysippus invokes a famous analogy:

> **T17** *(including **T14**)*[Chrysippus] goes back to his cylinder and spinning-top; these cannot begin to move unless pushed, but when this has happened he thinks that for the rest it is by their own nature that the cylinder rolls [straight] (*volvi*) and the top moves in a curve (*versari*).[35] "As therefore," he says, "he who pushes a cylinder gives it the beginning of its motion, but does not give it straight rolling (*volubilitas*), so *[**T14**]* an impressor (*visum*) when it strikes will, it is true, impress and as it were stamp its appearance on the mind, but assenting will be in our power, and in the same way as was said in the case of the cylinder: it is pushed from outside but for the rest moves by its own force and nature."
>
> (Cicero *Fat.* 42–3)

Chrysippus here presents the cylinder set in motion by a push from the outside as analogous to the person who receives an impression from the outside, assents to the impression, and thereby acts. We are supposed to appreciate how the (external) antecedent cause in the case of the agent is only the auxiliary and proximate cause of the action by seeing that this is so in the case of the cylinder. The same push from the outside will set the cylinder to rolling in a straight line, but it will set the conical top to rolling in a curve. The difference between the two cases shows that the external cause (the push) is no more a cause of the predicate "rolling straight" than it is of the predicate "rolling in a curve."

The analogous point in the case of assent is that an external cause which makes an impression on an agent will bring about very different actions in the case of different agents.[36] For example, a request for assistance is no more a cause of helpful than of callous behavior, since a helpful person will respond by helping while a callous or lazy person will respond by turning away.[37]

All four of examples of antecedent causation conform to the standard Stoic causal schema: Body A is the cause
 to Body B of incorporeal effect C: ↳

Cylinder:		
ANTECEDENT CAUSE	(Body A)	The person who pushes
THAT TO WHICH IT IS THE CAUSE	(Body B)	The cylinder
EFFECT		Rolling straight.
Cone:		
ANTECEDENT CAUSE	(Body A)	The person who pushes
THAT TO WHICH IT IS THE CAUSE	(Body B)	The cone
EFFECT		Rolling in a curve.
Kind agent:		
ANTECEDENT CAUSE	(Body A)	The person who asks for help
THAT TO WHICH IT IS THE CAUSE	(Body B)	The kind person
EFFECT		Helping.
Callous agent:		
ANTECEDENT CAUSE	(Body A)	The person who asks for help
THAT TO WHICH IT IS THE CAUSE	(Body B)	The callous person
EFFECT		Turning away.

In all four examples, the antecedent cause is a body that acts on another body to produce an effect. Also, in all four cases, the second body is not merely the locus of the effect, but also a cause. Cicero's report makes this explicit in the case of the cylinder, which moves "by its own force and nature" (*suapte vi et natura*, **T17**). Gellius's report makes the analogous point in the case of agents who "through their own perversity and voluntary impulse" (*sua tamen scaevitate et voluntario impetu*) "hurl themselves into constant crimes and errors" (*NA* 7.2.8 = LS 62D2, trans. Sharples). Thus, here we have a relation of "cause to cause" in a robust sense. It is not simply that Body A and Body B are causes, and that A has an effect on B; rather, A initiates the process whereby B causes C.

Once we have recognized that in these cases of antecedent causation both Body A and Body B are causes of C, it is easy to see that A is insufficient to account for C. While the pushing may be responsible for the fact that the cone or cylinder moves at all ("these cannot begin to move unless pushed" [**T17**]), it is not responsible for the fact that the motion is rectilinear as opposed to curved. While the external impressor may be responsible for the fact that the agent assents or acts at all ("assenting could not occur unless aroused by an impressor (*commota viso*)" Cicero *Fat.* 42), it is not responsible for the fact that the action is kindly, as opposed to callous. Taking our cue from Cicero's indication (*Fat.* 44) that the auxiliary and proximate cause is not necessitating we may suppose that Chrysippus construes the distinction between antecedent causes that are "perfect and principal" and those that are merely "auxiliary and proximate" roughly as follows:[38]

> PERFECT & PRINCIPAL ANTECEDENT CAUSES
>
> 1. A is the antecedent cause to B of C; and

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> 2. A's activity makes C necessary. ↳
>
> AUXILIARY & PROXIMATE ANTECEDENT CAUSES
>
> 1. A is the antecedent cause to B of C; and
>
> 2. A's activity does not make C necessary.

The antecedent cause of the cylinder's rolling straight is no more a cause of rolling straight than of rolling in a curve, so this disqualifies it from being the perfect and principal cause of either effect. Similarly, in the case of action, a request for assistance is no more a cause of helpful than of callous behavior, since a helpful person will respond by helping while a callous person will respond by turning away.

So understood, the status of being a "perfect and principal" as opposed to an "auxiliary and proximate" cause is always relative to the predicate specifying the effect. If the predicate in the cone or cylinder case was "being in motion," then the antecedent cause (the person who pushes it) would be the perfect and principal cause. That the cone or cylinder moves at all, or begins to move, is due to its being pushed. Similarly, in the more complex case of human action: that we act at all might arguably be attributed to external objects that impress us from the outside, for these externals initiate the process of impression, assent, and impulse. But whether we perform acts of kindness (vs. indifference), or of justice (vs. injustice), is not attributable to those external objects. This is the point Chrysippus makes by indicating that those external antecedent causes are only the "auxiliary and proximate" causes of the specific actions we perform. Since we are praised and blamed not for the mere fact that we act, but for acting one way rather than another, the antecedent causes of our actions do not make us perform the specific actions for which we are praised and blamed. The opponents' objection fails.

7. A Different Objection to the Stoics

It is common for modern readers, at this point in the discussion, to complain that Chrysippus is missing the point. We can agree with him that external causes of the sort under discussion do not "make" us act as we do. But the "real objection" that the Stoics must face is that our actions are necessitated by the totality of the conditions involved in the production of our actions. While a request for help does not on its own compel helpful behavior, it is still the case that when the request is made to helpful Henry, in circumstances where helping is possible and easy to do (and so on), it is *necessary* that Henry will help. And if Henry's helping is necessitated, it is not up to him—or so the objection goes.[39] According to this response, the crucial Stoic doctrine that generates the problem for human action is the determinism reported by Alexander in **T11**.

Later Stoics did in fact face such an objection, but before we consider their response, it is worth emphasizing that this is *not* the objection that Chrysippus faces in Text 12, and in response to which he invokes the cone and cylinder. While Cicero initially frames the issue as a dispute over whether our actions (or more specifically our
p. 480 assents) are necessitated under fate (*Fat.* 39, 41), neither the objection he reports nor Chrysippus's ↳ reply use the vocabulary of necessity. And when Cicero does later use that language to summarize Chrysippus's response, it is clear that it is not the necessitation belonging to sufficient conditions:

> **T18** Chrysippus, although he concedes that the proximate and contiguous cause of the assenting is located in the impressor, he does not concede that this is the necessitating cause of the assenting; and so he will not concede that, if all things come about by fate, all things come about as a result of antecedent causes that necessitate …
>
> (Cicero *Fat.* 44)[40]

What Chrysippus here (in Cicero's paraphrase) calls the "necessitating cause of assent" is either an impression or its external cause (*visum*), not the totality of the conditions in which the impression is made on the agent. The disputed issue in **T18** is whether the impressor "compels" the agents to assent and act as they do. This is the necessity of compulsion and force: the necessity of oppressive external influence, rather than sufficient prior conditions.[41]

This specific worry about external causes responds directly to the Stoics' own construal of fate as a causal nexus, in which any cause operating in the universe is also acted on by another cause (the latter being "cause to" the former). If everything happens by fate, then agents do not exercise their causality independently of the causal nexus. In particular, we cannot act without first being acted upon by external bodies.[42] Thus it is central to the Stoic conception of fate that our actions are responsive to external influence. The incompatibilist worry reported in **T12** is that this external influence amounts to compulsion. Chrysippus responds to this worry by showing that not all external causes compel. In the vocabulary he uses in **T16**: not all antecedent causes are "perfect and principal."

8. Later Stoic Compatibilism

Alexander of Aphrodisias, in chapter 13 of his *De Fato* reports a later Stoic argument (181.15–182.16) which he characterizes as an attempt "by those who claim that everything happens by fate" to show that what is up to us (*eph' hêmin*) is "preserved" (*sôzomenon*) (181.7–9).[43] These Stoics point out that what happens by fate comes about in accordance with (*kata*) the "proper nature" (*oikeia phusis*) of each thing. For example, it is the proper nature of a stone to travel downward, and of an animal to move "in accordance with impulse" (*kath' hormên*); such movement is brought about by (*hupo*) fate through (*dia*) the stone or the animal (182.3–4, 7–8). In both the animate and inanimate case, external causes must also be present, but when this is the case, the resulting movement is necessitated:[44]

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> **T19** Nothing of the things which are brought about by each thing in accordance with its proper nature, they say, can be otherwise, but each of the things brought about by them comes about necessarily (*katênankasmenôs*)—not in accordance with the necessity that results from force (*bia*) but in accordance with the necessity resulting from its being impossible for that which has a nature of that sort to be moved at that time in some other way and not in this, when the circumstances are such as could not possibly not have been present to it.
>
> (Alexander of Aphrodisias *Fat*. 181.21–5)

The Stoics here distinguish between the necessity of force or compulsion (*bia*) on the one hand, and on the other hand the deterministic necessitation we saw previously in **T11**. They make the general claim that the latter kind of necessity is a feature of everything that happens. A few lines later they explicitly attribute this latter kind of necessity to everything that happens by fate, including human actions:

> **T20** These things being so, and fate bringing about movements and activities in the world, some through earth … some through air, some through fire … and some also through living creatures (and such are the movements in accordance with impulse), *they say that those brought about by fate through the living creatures "are up to" the animals*—coming about in a similar way, as far as necessity is concerned, to all the others; because for these too the external causes must of necessity be present then, so that of necessity they perform the movement which is from themselves (*ex heautôn*) and in accordance with impulse in some such way.
>
> (Alexander of Aphrodisias *Fat.* 182.8–16)

These Stoics claim, in the second half of this passage, that action according to impulse is as determined as everything else that happens by fate: "of necessity they perform the movement which is from themselves and in accordance with impulse." But they do not allow that this necessitation conflicts with such actions being "up to us." In the italicized sentence, they claim that these fated actions are "up to us" (*eph' hêmin*) because they happen through (*dia*) us.

If Alexander is correct that the Stoic argument he presents here was intended to establish that the thesis of fate is compatible with our actions being up to us, its structure and emphasis are rather odd. It develops and expounds with precision and repetition the thesis that activity according to impulse occurs "necessarily," but it offers no defense of the conception of "what is up to us" on which it relies—a conception which Alexander states explicitly just before presenting their argument: "they say that what depends on us is what comes about through (*dia*) us" (181.14).[45] The argument he reports (181.15 ff) seems rather to aim at establishing that "our actions happen through us" is preserved under the thesis of fate, on the grounds that fate operates "through" us just as it operates "through" stones and anything else that has a "proper nature."

So understood, the compatibilist argument of these later Stoics can be reconstructed as follows:

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> LATER STOIC CONCEPTION OF WHAT IS UP TO US:
>
> 1. What happens through us is up to us.
>
> 2. Our fated actions happen through us (even though they happen "necessarily").
>
> 3. So, our fated actions are up to us.

Of course, this argument will not be successful unless the conception of "up to us" in (1) can be defended. Alexander rejects it, proposing instead that an action is up to us only if we have the power of choosing and doing the opposite (181.5–6, 13–14). He insists that what is up to us, so conceived, is not preserved under the Stoic thesis of fate, and thus what the Stoic argument "preserves" is not the real thing.

Here we find the beginning of a very different debate, one that must address whether the sort of "necessity" that is a consequence of determinism is incompatible with the feature of human agency captured by such locutions as "up to us." It is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider this further debate, although we can see from **T19** that at least one move the Stoics make is to insist that the "necessitation" implied by determinism is not the necessity of compulsion, implying that only the latter kind of necessity would preclude an action's being "up to us."[46]

Let us conclude by noting that Alexander's objection to the Stoic thesis of fate, unlike the earlier objection addressed to Chrysippus in **T12**, does not invoke the conception of fate as a causal nexus. The distinctive features of Stoic fate, which were the focus of the earlier objections, are now no longer the focus of the debate. Instead, the focus is on determinism, and a more familiar debate is emerging.[47]

Notes

1. Versions of this chapter profited from discussion at workshops at Colgate University and the University of Missouri, and from comments by Tengqin Han. I thank the editors and Andrew Melnyk for helpful written feedback. My analysis is greatly indebted to Bobzien 1998a.

2. Other objections include criticism of the Stoic arguments for the doctrine (which included appeals to bivalence and to the efficacy of divination) and charges that the doctrine would rule out possibility and contingency, or that it would license idleness. On these objections, see Bobzien 1998a and Salles 2005.

3. See Ierodiakonou, this volume.

4. Here and elsewhere, translations of texts are by, or are adapted from, LS.

5. On this translation of *aitia*, see note 7.

6. On *pneuma* as source of both individuation and movement, see Vogt 2018: 77–9.

7. Zeno says that the *aitia* is the *logos aitiou* (Stobaeus, *Ecl*. 1.39.4 = LS 55A5). I follow Bobzien 1999: 199–202 in construing the *aitia* invoked here as the cosmic *logos* (as in LS 55M3) and the *logos aitiou* as the portion of the divine *logos* that makes an individual body a cause. By contrast, Long and Sedley construe *aitia* as "explanation" and *logos aitiou* as a "statement (*logos*) of the cause." So too M. Frede 1980: 222 and Vogt 2018: 69, 74. Duhot 1989: 146 construes the *logos aitiou* to be the "conception" of the cause.

p. 483 8. Sometimes *heirmos* is translated into English (less literally) as a "chain," which invites confusion with the very different modern notion of a chain of events. On this, see Meyer 2009: 72–3. For a different alternative to the metaphor of the chain, see Hankinson 1996.

9. A classic statement of the view is Davidson 1963.

10. A point now well established, see LS, vol. 1: 343; D. Frede 2003: 189; Meyer 2009; Totschnig 2013.

11. Totschnig 2013: 122-4.

12. Vogt: 2018:76-82.

13. By contrast, D. Frede 2003: 189 construes the nexus as one in which "cause gives rise to cause"; LS, vol. 1: 343 offer a similar interpretation.

14. I discuss the evidence for the doctrine of *sumpatheia* in greater detail at Meyer 2009: 80–5.

15. In fact, the Stoics claim that the cosmos *is* a living animal (DL7.142–3); see also Powers, this volume. On the unity of the cosmos as a function of its sympathies, see *SVF* 2.473, 2.475; Arrian *Epict*. *diss*. 1.14.1–2; Marcus Aurelius *Med*. 9.9.2.

16. [Plutarch] *Fat*. 11 indicates that the doctrine of cosmic sympathy is one of the main points made by Chrysippus in his treatment of fate (*SVF* 2.912).

17. The translation that follows is significantly modified from LS.

18. The contrapositive of that thesis is attributed to Chrysippus by Plutarch (*St. Rep*. 1045c); see Bobzien 1998a: 36–44.

19. I have used the more neutral translation "come-to-be" for *gignetai*, rather than Long and Sedley's "happen," since bodies do not "happen."

20. If *kinêsis* is an activity (*energeia*) it is incorporeal (LS55C); it involves bodies, places, and times (50F)—the latter two being incorporeals (27D). Galen, however, reports that the Stoics say *kinêseis* are bodies (*SVF* 2.385).

21. First in the "*mête … mête*" construction of 192.3–6 [= b, c], and then in the "*alla … te … kai"* construction of 192.6–8 [= d, e].

22. Note that "following" (*akolouthia* and its cognates) is a relation between causes in **T2** and **T3**.

23. Bobzien 1998a: 19–21, in elucidation of Sextus Empiricus's claim that Stoic cases are "relative" (Sextus Empiricus *Math*. 9.207).

24. This is not to say that on the standard schema body A is *always* an antecedent cause (e.g., the scalpel is not obviously the antecedent cause of the flesh's being cut, since the cutting and the being cut are simultaneous). Bobzien 1998a: 19–21 and 1999: 203–4 restricts antecedent causes to causes of *kinêsis* (motion or change) as opposed to causes of *schesis* (condition), but it is unclear whether she means all causes of *kinêsis* are antecedent. Totschnig 2013: 122, note 8 construes Bobzien as denying that the three-place locution (A is the cause to B of C) applies to the causation of *schesis*; but I don't think this is her point. My own view is that **Thesis 2** in **T9** requires that *everything has* an antecedent cause, not that *every cause is* an antecedent cause. In cases of the standard schema where A is the non-antecedent cause to B of C, **Thesis 2**

requires that there be some other thing, D, that is "cause to" A. We will see in §5 that the Stoic analysis of human action conforms to this schema.

25. Translations of Cicero *Fat.* 39–45 (**T12–14** and **T16–18**) are by Sharples 1991, slightly modified.

26. Cicero seems to be using the expression "*sita in nobis*" as a matter of location in [C], and of modality in [D], where it is equivalent to *in nobis* in [E], which presumably translates the Greek *eph' hêmin* or a variant (on which see Gourinat 2014).

p. 484 27. See Kamtekar, this volume and Klein, this volume.

28. Two letters of Seneca mention entertaining an impulse (*impetum capere*) before assent and action occur (Seneca *Ep*. 78.2, 113.18); see Graver and Long 2015 ad loc. This might be what Cicero has in mind as the "impulse" to which assent is a consequence; Inwood 1985: 282, note 193 doubts the orthodoxy of Seneca's report.

29. The term "*visum*" may in Cicero's usage refer either to the impression (Greek: *phantasia*), or to the external cause that makes the impression on the perceivers' mind: the impressor (Brittain 2006: xli). While the second clause of **T13**, on its own, would admit either reading, the first clause leads us to expect an external cause (hence impressor); and it must be read in this way in **T14** (as it is by Salles 2005: 44).

30. Some impressions may arise from purely internal processes (as when one thinks about how to solve an abstract problem). However, these are not the sorts of cases the objector has in mind. I thank A. A. Long for stressing this point in conversation.

31. My translation, accepting Bury's deletion of [ἢ ὁρμαὶ].

32. Thanks to Brad Inwood for stressing this point.

33. Even the Academics characterize the antecedent cause of actions as "external and antecedent" (Cicero *Fat*. 23–4). On antecedent causes as external, see Hankinson 1987.

34. On Stoic causal distinctions, see LS, vol. 1: 342; M. Frede 1980, Hankinson 1998: chapter 14; D. Frede 2003: 187–92; Bobzien 1999. Two of the Stoic "swarm" identified by Alexander (*Fat.* 192.18–19) are the *prokatarktikon* cause and the *sunektikon* cause and Clement indicates that the latter is also called *autoteles* (*SVF* 2.346). Plutarch seems to construe Chrysippus's "perfect and principal" as an *autoteles* cause, and his "auxiliary and proximate" cause as *prokatarktikon* (LS 55R). But Clement and later writers indicate that the *prokatarktikon* and the *sunektikon* causes are jointly involved in producing the effect (the father is the *prokatarktikon* cause and the teacher the *sunektikon* cause of the pupil's learning—*SVF* 2.346). Many interpreters take Chrysippus to be thinking likewise: that the antecedent cause (e.g., the external impressor) is only the "auxiliary and proximate" cause of the action, while the agent's mind is the "perfect and principal" cause (M. Frede 1980: 234–6; LS, vol. 1: 393; Duhot 1989: 174–80; Sharples 1991: 199–200; Salles 2005: 43–4). (For a comprehensive list of such interpretations, see Bobzien 1999: 205, note 23.) However, as Bobzien argues, Chrysippus deploys his distinction only within antecedent causes (not to distinguish antecedent from non-antecedent causes). A further complication is that some later thinkers (e.g., the Stoic-inspired pneumatist Atheneus) distinguished both *prokatarktikon* and *sunektikon* causes from antecedent causes (LS 55F).

35. Cicero clearly intends *volvi* as distinct from *versari* to capture the determinate non-curving rolling that distinguishes the cone from the cylinder. Thus, I have translated it and the cognate *volubilitas* as "straight rolling."

36. Aulus Gellius's report of the same analogy (LS 62D) makes it clear that agents of different character are the analog to the cone and cylinder, although his report omits the psychological details of impression, impulse, and action.

37. In the case of the callous person, the call for help may produce the impression that helping is none of my business; in the lazy person it may elicit the impression that helping is the thing to do, but the agent might not assent to it.

38. I follow Sharples 1991 in translating *causam … necessariam* as "necessitating cause"; see **T18**.

39. See for example Brennan 2001.

p. 485 40. On translating *causam … necessariam*, see note 38. Even on the alternative translation "necessary cause," the phrase fails to invoke determining conditions.

41. As D. Frede (2003): 193 paraphrases the objection, "the external impression triggers a kind of mechanism such that the

person cannot help reacting like an automaton." In the complaint reported by Plutarch, "externals compel us (*katênankasthai … hupo tôn exôthen*)" (*Stoic. repug*. 1045b).

42. And this is generally true for all causes within the cosmos, according to **Thesis 2**. Unlike the unconditioned and fully active causality of the divine *logos*, causes of changes within the cosmos always have antecedent causes that are "causes to them." Thus, I agree with Vogt's claim that causality within the cosmos imperfectly approximates the cosmic causality of the divine *logos*, although for reasons that are different from hers.

43. The later date for the Stoic source is argued by Bobzien 1998: 359–61. Against this, Salles 2005: 69–81 argues that the doctrine is Chrysippean.

44. Translations of **T19** and **T20** are modified from Sharples 1983.

45. Deleting *kai*, with Sharples 1983 and Thillet 2011.

46. A famous modern version of this compatibilist argument is developed in Ayer 1954.

47. On that later debate, see Bobzien 1998b, Frede 2011, and Meyer and Hause 2017.

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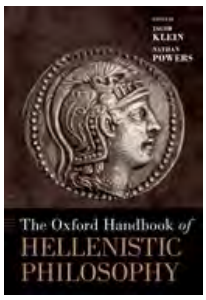
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CHAPTER

21 Chrysippus and Aristotle on Goods

Terence Irwin

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Abstract

It is likely that the early Stoics were familiar with Aristotle's views. This chapter considers a passage in which Plutarch reports that Chrysippus mentions and discusses Aristotle. According to Plutarch, Chrysippus alleges that Aristotle is inconsistent on the question whether one can recognize non-moral goods (including those that Aristotle describes as "external goods" or "goods of fortune") without abolishing the virtues. If we attend to this passage, to the Stoic doctrine of preferred and dispreferred indifferents, and to the Aristotelian claims that Chrysippus criticizes, we find that Chrysippus had a sound understanding of Aristotelian ethical claims. His criticisms are worth considering, but they do not undermine Aristotle's main claims.

Keywords: Aristotle, Chrysippus, Plutarch, virtues, indifferents

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1. Knowledge of Aristotle

It is conceivable that the early Stoics did not know the works that we know as the Aristotelian Corpus. Aristotle wrote a number of "exoteric" works designed for publication, which have been lost. In some cases, ostensible "fragments" survive, in the form of quotations or paraphrases by later authors. The works that survive in our manuscripts of the Corpus may originate in courses of instruction in the Lyceum. It is uncertain how far they were circulated, and how far Aristotle is responsible for the form in which we now know them. What happened to the Corpus in the period between the death of Aristotle and the edition by Andronicus in the first century BCE is uncertain.[1]

The lack of detailed evidence on this question makes it difficult to describe the philosophical context of early Stoicism. The difficulty is greater, however, in some areas of Stoic philosophy than in others. In some areas Aristotle disagrees sharply with Plato, and in other areas he takes up questions that Plato had left untouched. The Stoics were familiar with Plato, but they could hardly have guessed Aristotle's views on, for instance, the syllogism, or the relation of body and soul, or on substance and form, from what they read in Plato. In ethics, however, Aristotle's views are less sharply different from Plato's than they are in other areas of philosophy. Readers of the *Republic*, *Politicus*, *Philebus*, and *Laws* were acquainted (whether they knew it or not) with some of the basic principles of Aristotle's ethics.

It is improbable, in any case, that the early Stoics were unacquainted with Aristotle's views. Among Zeno's teachers were Crates the Cynic and Polemon the Academic, who were active shortly after the death of Aristotle.[2] Since Cynic ethical doctrines were sharply opposed to both Platonic and Aristotelian views, Zeno probably knew that some people disagreed with Crates, and that Aristotle was one of them. Whether or not he knew the
p. 488 Aristotelian ethical works that we know, he probably knew that Aristotle ↳ and Theophrastus agreed with Plato on many of the ethical questions on which Crates disagreed with them.[3]

After Aristotle's works were more widely circulated, in the first century BCE, students of ethics found it useful to compare Aristotelian with Stoic ethics. In *De Finibus* v Cicero examines Antiochus's efforts to reconcile Stoic with Peripatetic ethics. Among later Peripatetics Alexander uses Aristotle to explain what is wrong with Stoic doctrines. It is unlikely that Antiochus was the first person who explored the possibility of reconciliation, or that Cicero was the first to doubt whether any reconciliation is possible.

We need not confine ourselves, however, to these general considerations. Fortunately for us, Plutarch quotes and discusses a passage in Chrysippus that discusses Aristotle's ethics. If we study this passage, and some of the relevant context, we can see how much Chrysippus seems to know about Aristotle's views. This question is not purely historical. We would also like to find out how much the Stoics know about the aspects of Aristotelian ethics that seem to conflict most directly with central Stoic claims, and how they respond to them. Plutarch's quotation and discussion help us to answer these questions.

2. The Stoic Denial of Non-Moral Goods

Before we discuss Plutarch on Chrysippus, we should remind ourselves of one of the apparently central conflicts between Aristotle and Stoic ethics. This conflict can be traced back to Plato's *Euthydemus*. Socrates argues there that in order to achieve happiness, we must not only possess goods but also use them correctly. We can use them correctly, however, if and only if we have wisdom. On this basis Socrates reaches the following conclusions:

(1) The other goods are not good "in themselves" or "by themselves" (*auta kath'hauta*).

(2) When they are led by wisdom, they are "greater goods" than their opposites, and when they lack it, they are "greater evils."

(3) Wisdom is the only good and folly the only evil.[4]

These conclusions do not seem consistent, since (3) seems to conflict with (2). For (2) says the other goods are sometimes greater goods; and we might assume that they must be goods if they can be greater goods.[5] Moreover, it is not clear how (1) is related to (2) and (3). If "by themselves" means that they are not themselves goods, (1) seems to conflict with (2), if (2) implies that they are goods in some circumstances. If it means that they are not goods in isolation, but they become goods in some circumstances, (2) seems to conflict with (3).

p. 489 Different interpretations of the three claims make them consistent:

(a) We might weaken (3) so as to say that wisdom is the only thing that is a good all by itself; the other things need wisdom to control them.

(b) Alternatively, we might deny that (2) means that the other things are actually goods when wisdom uses them. Perhaps "greater goods" means "closer to being good," which does not imply that they are good.

This second interpretation is the one that the Stoics favor. According to the first of Cicero's Stoic paradoxes, only the fine (*kalon*, *honestum*) is good (Cicero, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 6–15). The Stoics agree with other ancient moralists who affirm that the different virtues are fine, and that the good they aim at is fine. They agree with Plato and Aristotle, against Epicurus, that the fine is also non-instrumentally good. But they maintain, contrary to Plato and Aristotle, that the fine is the only non-instrumental good.

The Stoics deny that the supposed non-moral goods (i.e., goods that are not fine) are good, on the ground that they lack an essential feature of a good. Goods are all beneficial, and evils are all harmful, but something that is neither beneficial nor harmful is neither good nor evil, but indifferent. All supposed goods that are not fine are neither beneficial nor harmful. Hence, they are neither good nor evil (Diogenes Laertius vii 101–3).[6]

3. Aristotle on Non-Moral Goods

Some questions that might be raised about the Stoic position will be clearer if we see why Aristotle rejects Socrates's view that nothing that can be misused is a good, or a good by itself. Contrary to Socrates and the Stoics, he believes that some goods sometimes cause harm (*EN* 1094b16–18). The alleged goods that Socrates disqualifies because they are misused include those that Aristotle calls "external" goods. These are good without qualification, but not always good for someone (1129b1–4). Virtue is the only good that cannot be misused, but it is not the only good. The good person is the one for whom the non-moral goods are good (*EE* 1248b34–7). Whereas Socrates denies that they are goods, because they can be used badly, Aristotle affirms that they are goods, because they can be used well.

Aristotle accepts Socrates's assumption that happiness consists only of goods, but among the goods that belong to happiness he includes external goods. Nor does he suppose that external goods are purely instrumental to virtuous action; the adornment (*kosmos*) that they add to life is distinguished from the virtuous person's use of them (*EN* 1100b26–8). Since they have this role in happiness, Socrates is wrong to claim that, since virtue is sufficient for happiness, the good person cannot be harmed (*EN* 1095b30–1096a2; 1153b19–25). Virtuous people never become miserable, because they always do the best that can be done with the resources they have (*EN* 1100b33–1101a8), but not being miserable does not ensure that they are always
p. 490 happy. The appropriate level of ↳ external resources is necessary for happiness, but not sufficient; the virtuous person achieves happiness by using them correctly.

In these different claims about external goods and about virtue Aristotle uses "good" in different ways. When he says that external goods are good without qualification, but not always good for someone, he means that they are not always good overall. He does not mean, for instance, that rich but foolishly extravagant people gain no benefit at all from being rich. He means that the benefits they gain (e.g., better medical treatment, a more comfortable house) are outweighed by the harm that they do themselves by their foolish extravagance. Let us say that in such cases something is a pro tanto good, but not an overall good.[7]

To see that Aristotle distinguishes goods in this way, we need to consider some of his claims about benefit and harm. As he observes, some people think that just and fine things are purely conventional because they are variable. Aristotle rejects this argument from variation, observing that goods also vary in the same way, and that their variation does not make them purely conventional. Sometimes goods benefit and sometimes they do harm; some people have been destroyed because of their wealth, and others because of their bravery (*EN*

1094b16–19). One of these examples of harmful goods is an external good, but the other is a virtue. Aristotle observes that bravery does brave people some harm sometimes. He does not agree, however, that bravery is ever harmful overall for the brave person. Virtuous people use external goods so that they are always good for them, whereas vicious people cannot use these same goods for their benefit (*EE* 1248b30–4). In this comparison of virtuous and vicious people, "good for" refers to overall benefit, not to pro tanto benefit.

The same division between pro tanto and overall goods is assumed in Aristotle's account of deliberation. He says it is sometimes hard to discriminate what should be chosen at the price of what, and what should be endured in exchange for what (*EN* 1110a29–30). In such cases there is something to be said for different courses of action, which are pro tanto good, but the one that we should choose, even at the price of some pro tanto evil, is the one that is better overall. Deliberation about goods rests on our wish (*boulêsis*) for the good (e.g., *EN* iii 4). Wish is for the overall good. If we believe *x* is a pro tanto good, but that *y* is better than *x*, and is therefore an overall good, our wish is for *y* as good overall. Sometimes Aristotle makes this comparative aspect of our wish for the good explicit (e.g., *De Anima* 434a5–10). It is taken for granted in the deliberation that seeks the means to our end and inquires into the best of the available courses of action (e.g., *EN* iii 3).[8]

These remarks on different types of goods help to clarify the place of external goods in happiness. Since happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with complete virtue in a complete life, and external goods are not parts of an activity, they are not parts of happiness. Aristotle says that the virtuous person uses external goods (1100b26–8). To "use" honor correctly is not to exploit it for the sake of virtuous activity, but to regulate it by virtue, so that I do not pursue it immoderately or rejoice in it excessively. The correct use—i.e., regulation—of honor is activity of the soul in accordance with complete virtue in a complete life.

This virtuous regulation of external goods is the overall good that belongs to the activity of complete virtue. But though no external goods are parts of happiness, some are more than simply necessary conditions. If we want to distinguish them from parts, strictly speaking, we may say that they are elements or constituents of happiness, and not simply instrumental means to it. If we have a collection of paintings by Turner to be arranged in an exhibition, we may arrange them well or badly, and in this respect they are not by themselves parts of a successful exhibition. Nor, however, are they simply resources to be exploited by the curator, in the way that the rooms or the lighting are resources. They are the goal of the exhibition, in the sense that the exhibition aims to present just these paintings in the best way. The parts of a good exhibition are the paintings as arranged in the most satisfying sequence that displays (for example) Turner's different themes and styles. There is more to happiness, as Aristotle conceives it, than the best arrangement of external goods, so that the analogy I have just offered may be misleading. But it may capture some of the relevant complications in the place of external goods in happiness.

4. Plutarch on Contradictions in Chrysippus

This disagreement between Aristotle and the Stoics is worth bearing in mind when we consider a passage in which Chrysippus is said to mention and to discuss Aristotle. Plutarch argues that Chrysippus contradicts himself on the question whether one can recognize non-moral goods without abolishing the virtues. In the course of this argument Plutarch mentions Chrysippus's views on Aristotle. First, he mentions a work *On Justice* in which Chrysippus's answer to the question is "Yes," in the particular case of pleasure. As long as we treat pleasure as a good rather than as the end, we can preserve the virtues.[9]

> (A) Again in the books concerning Justice after suggesting that for those who regard pleasure as [a] good but not [the] end it is possible to preserve justice as well he has affirmed this position and said in so many words: "For perhaps, it [sc. pleasure] being left as good but not end, and the fine also being

> among the things that are choiceworthy through themselves, we would preserve justice, leaving the fine and the just as a greater good than pleasure." This is what he says there about pleasure.
>
> (Plutarch *Stoic. repugn*. 1040c–d)[10]

In a work against Plato, however, Chrysippus's answer to the question is "No"; for he maintains that we abolish the virtues if we recognize any non-moral goods.

> (B) But in the books against Plato he denounces him for appearing to hold that health is good, and says that not only justice but magnanimity too, and temperance, and all the other virtues are annulled
p. 492 if we hold that pleasure or health or anything else that ↳ is not fine is good. As for what is to be said in Plato's defence, that rejoinder has been given elsewhere; but here is manifest the inconsistency of his accuser, who in one place asserts that justice is preserved if it is assumed that along with the fine pleasure too is good but elsewhere again charges with annihilation of all the virtues those who do not hold that only the fine is [good].
>
> (Plutarch *Stoic. repugn.* 1040c–e)

To support his allegation of inconsistency, Plutarch quotes from Chrysippus's discussion of Aristotle on justice.

> (C) In order to leave his self-contradictions not even a plea of defence, when writing against Aristotle on justice he declares him to be wrong in asserting that, if pleasure is [the] end, justice is annulled and along with justice each of the other virtues also. This is wrong according to him because, while justice is in truth annulled by them (who so treat pleasure), nothing prevents the other virtues from existing, since they would at any rate be good and approved even though not objects of choice because of themselves; and then he gives each of them by name. It is better, however, to repeat his own words: "For, pleasure being indicated as [the] end according to such an argument, all of this sort of thing does not seem to me to be included. That is why it must be stated that neither is any of the virtues an object of choice because of itself, nor any of the vices an object of avoidance, but all these must be referred to the target one has assumed. Nothing, however, would prevent, according to them, courage, prudence, continence, endurance, and the virtues similar to these from being classified as goods and the contrary [vices] from being objects of avoidance." Now who has ever been more reckless in argument than this man? He has lodged complaints against two of the best philosophers, against the one for annulling all virtue by not maintaining that only the fine is good, and against the other for not believing that all virtue except justice is preserved if pleasure is [the] end. The arrogance he displays is in fact amazing when, the same subject being under discussion, what he affirms himself in objecting to Aristotle he in turn denies in denouncing Plato.
>
> (Plutarch *Stoic. repugn*. 1040e–1041a)

To show that Chrysippus has no right to treat justice differently from the other virtues, Plutarch adds a further quotation about the reciprocity of the virtues.

> (D) Moreover, in the Demonstrations concerning Justice he says expressly: "Every correct action is a lawful act and an act of justice; but what is done in accordance with continence or endurance or prudence or courage is correct action; consequently it is also an act of justice." How, then, can he deny justice to those to whom he grants prudence and courage and continence, when whatever correct actions they perform with the virtues just mentioned they ipso facto perform justly as well?
>
> (Plutarch *Stoic. repugn*. 1041b)

The view that Chrysippus attributes to Aristotle in (C) overlaps with the view that he mentions in (A) without
p. 493 attribution. (A) says that if pleasure is treated as good but not as ↳ end, we can retain the virtues. (C) says that

if we treat pleasure as the end, we cannot retain the virtues. (A) explains why this is so: in order to recognize the virtues, we have to treat the fine as a greater good than pleasure, but we could not take this view of the fine if we treated pleasure as the end.

This paraphrase of the argument helps us to see what is meant by saying that pleasure is "good, but not end." Though the Greek here has no article, we have to take the claim about pleasure to say that pleasure is a good, but not the end. If pleasure is a good, it is thereby also some sort of end. If, however, it were the good, it would also be the ultimate end, and there would be no good greater than pleasure. The good that is greater than pleasure, namely the fine, is also the ultimate good, or part of it, and therefore the end, or part of it.

If we look at what the Stoics say about an end, we find some ambiguity. Stobaeus gives definitions that say we do everything for the sake of the end, but do not do it for the sake of anything else (ii 46.5–10). These definitions seem to rule out our saying that wealth is one of our ends in going to work each day, but is itself a means to some further end. The Stoics' definition, therefore, seems to be satisfied only by an ultimate end. If they mean this as a definition of "an end," they disagree with Aristotle's description of the hierarchy of ends (*EN* i 1–2). If they mean it as a definition of "the end"—in other words, of "the ultimate end"—it does not apply to sub-ultimate ends.

These Stoic remarks on the end suggest that when Chrysippus speaks of those who think pleasure as a good, but not as end (*telous de mê*), he means that these people deny that pleasure is the end, the ultimate end. He allows, then, that we can retain the virtues if we regard pleasure as only one good, and take the fine to be a greater good than pleasure.

5. What Does Chrysippus Know about Aristotle?

What work of Aristotle does Chrysippus refer to? First, we need to consider what is meant when Plutarch says that Chrysippus was "writing against Aristotle on justice," and goes on to report Chrysippus's criticisms of what Aristotle says about the relation between pleasure and justice. One might suppose that "on justice" is the title of a work by Aristotle.[11] Aristotle wrote a work *On Justice* in four books. According to Cicero in *De Republica*, Carneades used this work as a source of arguments for justice to which he raised objections (Cicero *Rep*. iii 12). Critics have tried to reconstruct the contents of *On Justice* from Carneades's objections, as reported in *De Republica*, the relevant parts of which have to be reconstructed from Lactantius.[12] This double process of reconstruction does not yield the view that Chrysippus rejects.

It is unnecessary, however, to attribute the opinion reported by Chrysippus and Plutarch to a work of Aristotle's on justice. Plutarch's phrase "on justice" may simply refer to the topic of Chrysippus's argument; Plutarch has
p. 494 already referred to a work on ↳ justice by Chrysippus (1040c), and the criticism of Aristotle may have been part of this work. Moreover, Chrysippus may not refer to a remark of Aristotle's that is explicitly about justice. He may simply be inferring what Aristotle maintains about justice from what he maintains about the virtues in general. If then we look for a doctrine about the virtues that could reasonably be taken to imply the doctrine that Chrysippus ascribes to Aristotle in the case of justice, do we need to resort to a lost exoteric work?

In fact, the appropriate doctrines can easily be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle requires the virtuous person to decide on the virtuous action for its own sake (1105a31–3). He denies that pleasure is the ultimate end (1172b26–35), and therefore he denies that pleasure is the end of the virtuous person's actions. He holds, then, that if pleasure were the ultimate end, there would be no room for virtue, as he conceives it, since the virtuous person's end in acting virtuously would have to be pleasure. Chrysippus, therefore, correctly describes the position of the *EN* on the question that Chrysippus raises about whether someone who treats pleasure as the end can still recognize the essential features of virtue.

It is worth Chrysippus's while to comment on this feature of Aristotle's position because it might be misunderstood. For Aristotle also emphasizes that the virtuous person must take pleasure in virtuous actions, and that taking the right kind of pleasure is a mark of being a virtuous person (1104b3–8, 1099a7–21). Does this mean that virtuous people act for the sake of pleasure, so that pleasure is their end? If that is what Aristotle means, he faces at least a prima facie difficulty in explaining how virtuous people can choose virtuous actions for their own sake; for, as Chrysippus also implies, it is not obvious how they can do this if pleasure is really their end.

Aristotle's answer to such questions depends on his views about the object of pleasure, and about the way in which pleasure can be an end. In his view, virtuous action is the object of our pleasure only if we regard virtuous action as choiceworthy for itself. If we are to take pleasure in virtuous action as such, we cannot regard virtuous action as a purely instrumental good to be chosen only for the sake of the pleasure it produces. The virtuous action itself is our primary end, and pleasure is a supervenient end, which we can attain only as a result of achieving our primary end (1174b26–33, 1175a21–8). If we neglected this division between the primary and the supervenient end, we might suppose that Aristotle contradicts himself, by saying both that virtuous action is to be chosen for its own sake, and that pleasure is an end of action, including virtuous action. If, however, we grasp Aristotle's views about pleasure and virtuous action, we see that pleasure, in his view, is not the end for the virtuous person, and that, as Chrysippus suggests, he regards the fine and just as a greater good than pleasure (Plutarch *Stoic. repugn.* 1040c).

We have no reason, therefore, to suppose that Chrysippus must be referring to a lost work of Aristotle. His reference fits the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[13] He does not quote Aristotle, but he gives a clear and fair account of the implications of Aristotle's position on hedonism. Even the brief passages quoted by Plutarch show that Chrysippus has more than a superficial grasp of the doctrine of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Someone might suppose that Aristotle's remarks on virtue and pleasure commit him to treating pleasure as the end, or that his
p. 495 views are inconsistent. Chrysippus sees that neither of ↳ these suppositions is justified, and that Aristotle does not make virtue a purely instrumental means to pleasure.

So far, Sections (A) and (C) describe a clear position, that it is possible to recognize the virtues if we treat pleasure as a good, but not as the end, and if we take the fine to be a greater good than pleasure that carries more weight than pleasure in the ultimate end. If we believe this, we can recognize the virtues; for we suppose that the virtuous person chooses the fine for its own sake, and in preference to any combination of other goods. If Chrysippus agrees that a proponent of these views can recognize the virtues, he is not saying that these views are correct; he is simply saying that we cannot fairly criticize these views on the ground that they fail to recognize the essential features of the virtues.

6. Chrysippus on Hedonism and the Virtues

Plutarch argues that Chrysippus contradicts himself, because he both affirms and denies that the Aristotelian view captures the essential features of the virtues. He denies it—according to Plutarch—for two reasons: (1) In Section (C) he alleges that the Aristotelian view expects too much of the virtuous person; for we can have all the virtues, except justice, even if we are hedonists. (2) In Section (B) he alleges that Aristotle expects too little, because we cannot have the virtues if we recognize any good other than the fine. Not only does each of these claims contradict Aristotle, but each of them also contradicts the other.

To see whether Chrysippus is so badly off, let us first consider his comments on hedonism. Plutarch alleges that Chrysippus attacks Aristotle's view that we undermine the virtues if we regard pleasure as the end. In his support he first paraphrases Chrysippus (*Stoic. repugn.* 1040e), and then quotes him (1040f). Neither the paraphrase nor the quotation, however, supports Plutarch's allegation that Chrysippus affirms that the hedonists can preserve the virtues. The paraphrase says only that the hedonists treat the virtues apart from

justice as good and approved, even though they are not choiceworthy because of themselves (1040e). Nor does the quotation imply that Chrysippus endorses the hedonist conception of the virtues. He begins by stating that if pleasure is taken to be the end, "all of this sort of thing does not seem to me to be included" (1040f). We lack a context to tell us what "this sort of thing" is, but the following clause suggests that it is a more radical thesis about pleasure and the virtues; this is not "included" because it is open to hedonists to make a more moderate claim. He then says what the moderate claim is. After pointing out that, according to the hedonists, none of the virtues is choiceworthy in its own right, he observes that hedonists may none the less advocate the virtues: "Nothing, however, would prevent, according to them, courage, prudence, continence, endurance, and the virtues similar to these from being classified as goods and the contrary [vices] from being objects of avoidance." Hedonists are free to argue that the virtues, as they conceive them, are instrumental goods.

p. 496 Contrary to Plutarch, then, Chrysippus does not say that the hedonists recognize the essential features of the virtues. He says only that, according to the hedonists, nothing will prevent the virtues from being goods.[14] The hedonists recognize not the self-regarding virtues themselves, but the fact that they are goods of some sort. In the previous clause Chrysippus has said that in the hedonists' view none of the virtues is choiceworthy in itself, but all are choiceworthy only for the sake of pleasure. In this passage he is talking about the virtues not as he conceives them, but as the hedonist conceives them.

Why, we might ask, does Chrysippus distinguish the other virtues from justice within the hedonists' account? We might suppose, along the lines suggested by Socrates in the *Protagoras*, or presumably by Eudoxus, or by Epicurus, that virtuous actions are means to maximizing one's long-term pleasure.[15] Chrysippus concedes this point, but only for the virtues other than justice, because he does not believe that the hedonist analysis works in the case of justice. The hedonist may suggest that just action is the best policy for someone who does not want to live in fear of retaliation by other people, but Chrysippus might reply that, for reasons suggested by Plato in *Republic* ii, this defense applies only to avoiding unjust actions that will be detected.

Chrysippus's remark on hedonism, therefore, does not support Plutarch's claim that Chrysippus rejects Aristotle's claim that all the virtues are abolished by those who treat pleasure as the end (*Stoic. repugn.* 1040e, *tês hedonês ousês telous* …). The quotation does not say that the virtues are not abolished. It only says that the hedonists can still affirm that the self-regarding virtues are goods, because they are means to pleasure. It would indeed be surprising if Chrysippus were to say that both the hedonists and Plato and Aristotle preserve the virtues, but this is not what he says, if we attend to the quotations rather than to Plutarch's comments.

This conclusion does not imply that Plutarch is deliberately dishonest. More probably, his enthusiasm for finding contradictions in Chrysippus makes him careless about distinguishing Chrysippus's exposition of the hedonist case for the virtues, as hedonists conceive them, from Chrysippus's view on the nature of the virtues. This is an intelligible mistake. At any rate, this passage does not justify Plutarch's claim that Chrysippus contradicts himself.

Our discussion of Chrysippus on hedonism and the virtues, therefore, supports our previous suggestion. Chrysippus holds that Aristotle's account of the virtues recognizes their essential character and that the hedonist account does not. He recognizes, therefore, that Stoics are not the only people who can recognize the essential character of the virtues.

7. Chrysippus's Criticism of Plato

This conclusion, however, still faces an objection, once we turn to Plutarch's other reason for attributing a self-
p. 497 contradictory view to Chrysippus. According to Plutarch in ↳ Passage (B), Chrysippus criticizes Plato for allowing that health is a good, on the ground that such a view implies the abolition of the virtues. This criticism of Plato contradicts Chrysippus's agreement with the Aristotelian view that we can recognize the virtues if we hold that some goods are not fine, but are inferior to the fine. Chrysippus's comment avoids committing Plato to the view that virtue is sufficient for happiness; on this point Chrysippus disagrees with Antipater, who holds that, according to Plato, only the fine is good and virtue is sufficient for happiness, as the Stoics hold (Clement *Stromata*. v 97.6 = *SVF* iii Antipater 56).

In this case Plutarch is on stronger ground. Since the Stoics certainly claim that only the fine is good, we might reasonably expect them to say that anyone who disagrees with them on this point abolishes the virtues. But if that is what they say, it is puzzling that they concede that Aristotle can recognize the virtues. We might wonder whether Plutarch has misrepresented the extent of their concession to Aristotle. Alternatively, we might wonder whether he has misrepresented Chrysippus's objection to Plato. The Stoic doctrine that only the fine is good might be taken to say that only the fine is a pro tanto good, or to say that only the fine is good overall. If Chrysippus's criticism of Plato means that we cannot recognize the virtues if we take any non-moral goods to be overall goods, and his agreement with Aristotle means that we can recognize the virtues if we take non-moral goods to be pro tanto goods, his criticism of Plato is consistent with his agreement with Aristotle.

The suggestion that Chrysippus intends this criticism of Plato is not to be rejected on the ground that Chrysippus would not be so careless as to introduce such an ambiguity into his claims about virtue. The remarks about Plato and Aristotle that Plutarch quotes are taken from two different works by Chrysippus, and the contexts may have made it clear what Chrysippus means by saying that only virtue is good. It may be Plutarch who creates the apparent ambiguity or conflict by juxtaposing two passages without enough context.

A more serious objection to the attempted reconciliation of Chrysippus's remarks on Plato with those on Aristotle is that it attributes an implausible view to Plato. Could Chrysippus suppose that Plato treats non-moral goods as overall goods? Given Plato's views on the superiority of justice over all non-moral goods, would Chrysippus not misunderstand him grossly if he took him to hold the strong version of the claim about non-moral goods (that some are overall goods)?

It is not obvious, however, that Chrysippus would be wrong to attribute the strong version to Plato. At the end of *Republic* iv, Glaucon suggests that just as life is not worth living without bodily health, it is not worth living without justice, which is the healthy condition of the soul (445a5–b4). This suggestion treats bodily health as something more than just one non-moral pro tanto good. Glaucon treats it as a good without which life is not worth living; we might call it an indispensable good. Chrysippus has a good reason to assert that recognition of health as an indispensable good is inconsistent with the virtues; for if the just course of action undermines health, justice still requires us to pursue it. Perhaps Chrysippus is being unfair to Plato if he attributes Glaucon's comparison to Plato. But if that is what he has in mind, his disagreement with Plato does not contradict his agreement with Aristotle's claims about virtue.

p. 498 As far as this passage goes, therefore, we can attribute a consistent position to Chrysippus. He considers three views: (1) Pleasure is the ultimate good. (2) Health is an indispensable good. (3) There are non-moral pro tanto goods. He attaches no names to the hedonist view. He attributes the belief in health as an indispensable good to Plato, and the belief in non-moral pro tanto goods to Aristotle. He argues that since the virtues require (a) recognition of virtue as a non-instrumental good, and (b) recognition of it as a greater good than any combination of other goods, Aristotle's position allows the preservation of virtue, but the views of Epicurus and Plato undermine virtue. In Chrysippus's view, Aristotle's position on goods is not to be rejected on the ground that it undermines the virtues.

8. Chrysippus's Concession on Goods and Indifferents

Even if Chrysippus's position can be made to appear consistent in this one passage, do his views as a whole not exclude the sort of concession to Aristotle that I have described? Before we consider that question, it will be useful to take account of another concession that may seem surprising. Plutarch accuses Chrysippus of inconsistency in his attitude to preferred indifferents, because on one occasion he allows that one might treat them as goods without going too far astray.

> And in *On Goods* i he in a way concedes and allows anyone who wants to call the preferred things goods and the opposites of them evils, in these words: "If someone wants in accordance with such distinctions to call one of them good and the other evil, being directed to these things (*pragmata*), and does not go astray at random … not going astray about the significates, and for the rest aiming at common practice in use of names."[16] And so here he combines and unites the preferred with the good. But elsewhere on the contrary he says that none of these at all is anything to us, but reason pulls us back and turns us away from all these sorts of things.
>
> (Plutarch *Stoic. repugn.* 1047e–1048a = LS 58H)

This passage may surprise us because it seems to say that a division on which the Stoics spend some effort is not especially important. The division between goods and indifferents seems to be central in Stoic views about virtue and happiness.[17] Indeed, we might think it is another way of saying that only the fine is good. Supposed goods that are not fine cannot really be good; therefore, they cannot contribute to happiness; therefore, they are indifferent in relation to happiness. In this passage, however, Chrysippus seems to suggest that in some way it is all right to speak of indifferents as good and bad.

Chrysippus considers opponents who maintain that preferred and dispreferred indifferents (as the Stoics describe them) are actually good and bad, in the normal sense of "good" and "bad."[18] We might wonder how
p. 499 Chrysippus could concede anything to ↳ this position, since it is incompatible with his position. Plutarch does not tell us what would follow from Chrysippus's concession, or for what purpose, or within what limits, Chrysippus intends the concession.

The discussion of Aristotle provides an intelligible context for this passage. Chrysippus acknowledges that we can preserve the virtue of justice if we regard pleasure as a good, but we regard the fine and the just as a greater good (1040c). Someone who holds this view agrees with Chrysippus's opponent who recognizes non-moral goods. It is not surprising, then, if Chrysippus regards this position as worth discussing, and grants that it allows us to recognize important truths about the virtues.

"Good" signifies that something is such as to benefit; but it may refer to pro tanto benefit or to overall benefit. If the opponents are so impressed by the differences between preferred and dispreferred indifferents that they call the former goods and the latter evils, they probably do not take "benefit" to refer to overall benefit; for this is not the most striking difference between the preferred and the dispreferred. The most striking difference is between pro tanto benefit and pro tanto harm. This, then, is probably the type of benefit and harm that opponents have in mind. In that case the opponents agree on some points with the Stoics. When they say that preferred indifferents (as the Stoics regard them) are good, they do not mean that health, wealth, and so on are overall goods. Hence, they still preserve the virtues.

Chrysippus, then, allows that for some purposes it is harmless to affirm that indifferents are good and bad. In particular, acceptance of the goodness and badness of indifferents still allows the recognition of the virtues as states that choose the fine for its own sake over any combination of non-moral goods. Chrysippus examines different conceptions of the good by asking whether they allow the existence of genuine virtues, as the Stoics conceive them, and he agrees that the Aristotelian conception of the good meets his conditions for virtue.

9. Disputes about the Virtues

When Chrysippus says that the Aristotelian view about goods does not "do away with virtue" and that it "preserves" virtue, he implies that it allows us to give a true account of virtue. This attitude to virtue agrees with some of Cicero's descriptions of virtue and the attitudes that it requires. According to Cicero, we have the virtues only if we take happiness to include virtue. If we take happiness to consist in pleasure, and we take virtue to be purely instrumental to pleasure, we cannot consistently cultivate the virtues.

> But some schools distort every duty (*officium*) by the ends of goods and evils that they present. For anyone who introduces the supreme good in such a way that it has no connexion with virtue, and measures it by his own advantages, and not by the right (*honestum*), this person, if he is consistent with himself and is not sometimes overcome by goodness of nature, could not cultivate either
> p. 500 friendship or justice or ↳ generosity; and certainly he cannot possibly be brave if he judges pain the highest evil, or temperate if he takes pleasure to be the highest good.
>
> (*De Officiis* i 5)

Here Cicero allows that individual Epicureans may be virtuous people, but only through actions and implicit beliefs that conflict with the implications of their own theory (Cicero, *Fin.* ii 80). The Epicurean theory that precludes genuine virtue is summed up by Epicurus's remark that he spits on the fine and on those who idly (*kenôs*) admire it, whenever it produces no pleasure (Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 547a = Usener 512). He rejects the view of anyone who "walks around idly (*kenôs peripatê(i)*) chattering about the good" (Plutarch *Non Posse* 1091b = Usener 423). The Epicurean view of the good leaves out the fine (*expers honestatis*; Cicero, *Fin.* ii 35).[19]

Epicurus's reference to walking (*peripatein*) may indicate that he has Peripatetics in mind; at any rate, Aristotle holds the view that Epicurus rejects. Similarly, when Cicero rejects Epicurus's instrumental conception of virtue, he contrasts it with the Aristotelian conception. He does not say that we do away with virtue unless we suppose that only the fine is good and that other supposed goods are only preferred indifferents. Cicero contrasts the dispute between Stoics and Peripatetics with the dispute between both of these schools and the Epicureans. The Stoics and Peripatetics dispute about the value (*dignitas*) of virtue in comparison with other supposed goods (*Fin.* ii 68). They do not dispute about the nature of the virtues, and neither Cicero nor Chrysippus accuses Peripatetics of doing away with the virtues. Though Cicero is not a Stoic, his account of the dispute between Stoics, Peripatetics, and Epicureans about virtue matches the view we have attributed to Chrysippus on the basis of Plutarch's remarks.[20]

10. Should the Stoics Disagree with Aristotle?

Now that we have seen how Chrysippus understands and evaluates some of Aristotle's claims about the virtues and other goods, we might ask why the Stoics reject Aristotle's position none the less. In some cases, their arguments seem to be answerable by reference to Aristotelian distinctions that (as we have seen) Chrysippus recognizes.

Some of the relevant Stoic arguments recall the *Euthydemus*.

> (A) Of things that are they say some are goods, some evils, some neither. Goods are the virtues—wisdom, justice, courage, temperance and the rest. Evils are the opposites—folly, injustice and the rest. Neither goods nor evils are those things which neither benefit nor harm—such as life, health, pleasure, beauty, strength, wealth, good reputation, good birth—and the opposites of these—death, sickness, trouble, ugliness, weakness, poverty, bad reputation, low birth and things like them—as

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> Hecaton says in *On The End* vii, and Apollodorus in the *Ethics*, and Chrysippus. For, ↳ they say, these things (life etc.) are not goods but indifferents, though of the preferred species.
>
> (B) For just as it is peculiar to hot to heat, not to chill, likewise it is peculiar to good to benefit, not to harm. But wealth and health benefit no more than they harm; hence neither wealth nor health is a good.
>
> (C) Moreover, they say, whatever can be used well and badly, that is not a good; but health or wealth can be used well and badly; hence neither wealth nor health is a good.[21] Poseidonius, however, says that these also are among goods.
>
> (D) Hecaton in *On Goods* ix and Chrysippus in *On Pleasure* say that pleasure is not a good either; for (they say) there are shameful as well as fine pleasures, but nothing shameful is a good.
>
> (E) To benefit is to begin or maintain something according to virtue; to harm is to begin or maintain something according to vice.
>
> (DL vii 101–3)

(A) and (E) are statements of Stoic doctrine. (B), (C), and (D) appear to offer arguments for these doctrines. (B) and (C) recall the *Euthydemus*. (D) is a distinct argument, relying on a point similar to (C).

What sorts of arguments are offered in (B)–(D)? They might be expository arguments—addressed to Stoics, relying on Stoic premisses, and explaining the relation between different moral properties, as the Stoics conceive them. Alternatively, they might be intended as persuasive arguments—addressed to non-Stoics, relying on premisses that a non-Stoic might accept, and offering a non-Stoic a reason to accept the Stoic conclusion. (C) and (D) appear to be persuasive arguments, since a non-Stoic might accept their minor premisses (health and wealth can be used badly; there are base as well as fine pleasures). (B) is less clear, since the minor premiss (wealth and health benefit no more than they harm) is ambiguous. It might be taken as (1) an expository remark, stating the Stoic view that no indifferent either benefits or harms, or (2) a persuasive remark, stating that wealth and health are both beneficial (on some occasions) and harmful (on other occasions). A non-Stoic might be expected to accept (2).[22] Socrates in the *Euthydemus* uses (2) to draw a conclusion that may be interpreted as the conclusion of (B). Since (C) and (D) are persuasive arguments, (B) is probably a persuasive argument too.

The minor premiss of (B) is plausible if "benefit no more than harm" means, for example, that sometimes wealth benefits us and sometimes it harms us. In that case we can still say that tokens of wealth (e.g., the virtuous philanthropist's wealth, used to build a new sewer for the city) are beneficial, even if other instances (e.g., the corrupt politician's wealth, used to harm the city) are harmful. This use of "no more F than not F" is familiar from Plato; since giving back what we have borrowed is just on some occasions, but not on others, it is no more just than unjust. This is the sort of variation between opposites on different occasions from which the form of justice must be free.

Whether or not this is the right interpretation of (B), it is the only plausible interpretation of (C); indeed, we might think that, as in the *Euthydemus*, (C) is the basis of (B). If the good use of wealth makes wealth beneficial and the bad use makes it harmful, then wealth benefits us no more than it harms us.

p. 502 The conclusion of (B) and (C) is apparently open to objection. If wealth is no more beneficial (on some occasions) than harmful (on others), apparently we should infer not that it is neither one nor the other, but that it is both beneficial (on some occasions) and harmful (on others). Hence it does not follow that only virtue is beneficial. All that follows is that only virtue is beneficial on all occasions.

The Stoics might answer this objection by observing that if we concede that wealth benefits us only on the occasions when it is used well, we are conceding that it is not really wealth that benefits us. What benefits us on those occasions is the good use that virtue makes of wealth. Hence the non-Stoic view that wealth benefits us in so far as it is used well really undermines itself; as soon as we admit that we need virtue to use wealth correctly, we have to agree that what really benefits us is the virtuous use of wealth. Therefore, it is virtue that is beneficial, and only virtue is really a good.

Argument (D) applies the same strategy to pleasure. If some pleasures are shameful, and nothing shameful is good, pleasure is no more good than bad. Whether it is good or bad depends on whether it is virtuous or not. But if it is virtue that makes pleasure good when it is good, we should attribute the goodness to virtue rather than to pleasure. This is another argument from the variations in some alleged non-moral good to the conclusion that only virtue is good.

These arguments raise doubts about Aristotle's views on non-moral goods. If he thinks that wealth is good because it sometimes benefits us, why does he not think it is also bad because it sometimes harms us? And if he thinks it is good because it can be used well, why does he not think it is also bad because it can be used badly? Aristotle replies that is reasonable to look at the goodness and badness of non-moral goods from the good person's point of view. The good person's good use of wealth does not make wealth good; on the contrary, the good person is able to use what is genuinely good about wealth so as to produce a beneficial result. The fact that other people do not see how to use what is good about wealth does not show that there is nothing good about wealth. Wealth is always of some benefit to us, so that being wealthy is pro tanto better for us than being poor, because it gives us resources that can be used well; but it may sometimes be worse for us overall in specific circumstances, if it allows vicious people to pursue their vicious activities more vigorously. This is Aristotle's reason for saying that vicious people cannot benefit from their use of external goods; he means that they gain no overall benefit from it.

This answer to the Stoics does not wholly reject their conclusion. Aristotle agrees that something is good overall only if it always benefits us overall and never harms us overall. He also agrees that virtue is the only good that meets these conditions for being good overall. But this point of agreement with the Stoics does not require Aristotle to agree that virtue is the only good; for, though it is the only overall good, it is not the only pro tanto good. Aristotle seems to introduce some clarity into the discussion of goods by distinguishing pro tanto goods from overall goods. Chrysippus's discussion of Aristotle, as we have followed it in Plutarch, shows that he understands Aristotle's distinction. When he agrees that we can preserve the virtues if we treat pleasure as a good, but not as the end, he does not mean that we can treat pleasure as an overall good. Similarly, when he is
p. 503 willing, for some purposes, to allow preferred indifferents to be called goods, he ↳ does not mean that it is all right to regard them as overall goods; the permissible view is only that they are pro tanto goods. These concessions to Aristotle presuppose that the Aristotelian division between pro tanto and overall goods is intelligible.

In that case, the arguments derived from the *Euthydemus* do not help the Stoics to show that only the fine is good. The arguments are open to cogent Aristotelian objections, for reasons that Chrysippus makes clear in his discussion of Aristotle's views about virtue and about goods. If Chrysippus sees the significance of his comments on Aristotle, he has good reason to reject these arguments from the *Euthydemus*.

Chrysippus would have a good reason to deny that wealth is even a pro tanto good if he could show that it does not contribute at all to our overall benefit. Virtuous people benefit from wealth because they use wealth well. But they can equally use poverty well, and hence they benefit from poverty; it is virtue that confers the benefit by using wealth or poverty badly. Aristotle agrees that virtue uses good or bad circumstances to make virtuous people as well off as they can be in those circumstances (1100b33–1101a6). But he disagrees with the Stoics in maintaining that if A and B are equally virtuous, and hence make equally good use of whatever external goods

they have, but A has more external goods than B has, A is to that extent better off than B. The Stoics claim that in these circumstances A and B are equally well off.

To see why Aristotle's view is plausible, we may return to the *Euthydemus*, and to Socrates's claim that happiness consists in "using things correctly" (282a3–4). An example will show that we might take this claim in two ways: (1) I will dig this peat bog deep enough to extract peat for fuel if and only if I use a long sharp spade correctly. If I have the best spade, but no idea of how to dig with it, I will not dig very well. (2) I will dig the peat bog successfully if I have only a tablespoon, but I use it ingeniously. The second claim (let us suppose) is false; no ingenuity with a tablespoon can make up for the lack of a good enough spade for digging peat. Socrates's phrase "using things correctly" might be taken in either of these two ways, so that "things" are either (1) the appropriate things for the relevant activity or (2) whatever things are available. Only the second way of understanding "using things correctly" yields the conclusion that wisdom is necessary and sufficient for happiness, which is the conclusion that Socrates seems to intend (282c9–d1). Aristotle understands "using things correctly" in the first way, since he believes that external goods are pro tanto goods. The Stoics need to understand "using things correctly" in the second way, in order to show that happiness consists in the correct use of whatever is available. Further discussion is needed to show how well they argue for this conclusion.

11. Different Ways of Undermining the Virtues

Though we have seen why Chrysippus believes that Aristotle's view about non-fine goods does not undermine
p. 504 the virtues, the Stoics also maintain that anyone who denies ↳ that only the fine is good undermines the virtues. If Chrysippus's position is consistent, the sort of "undermining" that he has in mind must be different from the sort that he has in mind when he says (for the reasons we have considered) that Aristotle does not undermine the virtues. We might distinguish theoretical from practical undermining. Aristotle does not undermine them, to the extent that he gives them the right theoretical status, as goods that are to be chosen for their own sake in preference to any other goods (as Aristotle conceives them). The Stoics agree that this is the status that should be accorded to virtue. They believe, however, that anyone who holds this belief, and believes that there are other genuine goods besides virtue, will not be able to be virtuous. Hence Aristotle does not undermine the virtues theoretically, but undermines them practically. Hence the fact that the Stoics object to Aristotle's practical undermining of the virtues does not count against the view we have attributed to Chrysippus, that Aristotle does not undermine the virtues theoretically.

According to Cicero, the Stoics argue that alleged goods that can be misused cannot be parts of happiness. They argue that happiness must be composed of parts that are similar to each other (Cicero *TD* v 45). Cicero suggests that if happiness has non-honorable as well as honorable parts, the result will not be an honorable whole. But the falsity of this suggestion is obvious if we think of organic compounds. While many parts of a house may not be beautiful, the whole house that contains these parts may be beautiful, and the ugly parts may be necessary for the beauty of the whole (if, e.g., the beautiful pillars are held together by brackets that, seen by themselves, are ugly).

The Stoics might reply that if happiness includes these supposed goods that are capable of harming us, it is a compound of elements that are in perpetual danger of conflict. A virtuous person's life is not like that, because its parts are not, say, health, wealth, and honor, but virtue using each of these things. Since these different parts are simply different manifestations of virtue, the parts of happiness are in this respect uniform, so that happiness is uniform after all.

This is a reasonable defense of the uniformity of happiness, but it does not create any conflict with the concession to Aristotle. The reason for insisting that virtue has to use the natural advantages is the fact that they are not beneficial overall on their own. They benefit us overall only in so far as they are properly used by

virtue. Aristotle also recognizes this feature of the natural advantages. It does not imply that the natural advantages are not pro tanto goods.

We can say something similar about the Stoic contention that the fine and the expedient cannot conflict. This is a theme of *De Officiis*. The argument is stated briefly by Epictetus (i 22.13–14). If it is in my interest to possess something that I could possess only by taking it from my neighbor, it is also in my interest to take it from my neighbor; this is the source of conflicts, wars, and other acts of injustice. Epictetus offers this as a reason for denying that anything other than virtue is a good (§11–§12); but what does he mean by this? If we believe that the pursuit of non-moral goods is sometimes in our overall interest, even though it is shameful, we recognize conflicts between the fine and the expedient. The Stoics believe that the recognition of this sort of conflict undermines ↳ virtue. They agree with Plato and Aristotle that virtuous people believe truly that it is good for them overall to be virtuous and to act virtuously. But we can hold this view without denying that preferred indifferents are pro tanto goods. These considerations do not warrant the rejection of non-moral pro tanto goods.

Nor is it clear that the Stoic contention that only the fine is good conflicts with the concession to Aristotle. The arguments for this contention begin with a premiss about goods. The premiss says, for instance, that whatever is good is praiseworthy (Cicero, *Fin.* iii 27). This premiss is plausible if it says that nothing is good overall unless it is praiseworthy. If we contemplated some action that would make us much richer, but would require a vicious action, it would be shameful rather than praiseworthy. Since being praiseworthy is much better than enriching us, choosing to enrich ourselves would be a choice of the lesser good, and therefore would not be good overall. The Stoic argument, so understood, is consistent with the Aristotelian view about non-moral goods. In his reply to the Stoic arguments (*Fin*. iv 48–9) Cicero maintains that the Peripatetics would not concede the Stoic premiss. But if the premiss is about what is good overall, Aristotle has no reason not to concede it.

On this basis we can also agree with the Stoics that the ultimate good must be simple (Cicero, *Off*. iii 119). It is simple if it is nothing more than the appropriate sort of virtuous activity. But if the appropriate virtuous activity is the virtuous use of pro tanto goods, this single activity includes the use of pro tanto goods that are distinct from virtue. Our previous discussion of Aristotle's view that activity in accordance with virtue includes the use of non-moral goods explains how he might agree with the Stoic contention.

More complicated questions arise from a different sort of Stoic objection to non-moral goods. The Stoics argue that bravery and magnanimity require freedom from fear. We would not be free from fear if we recognized non-moral goods; for, if they are really good, we will fear their loss, and so we cannot have the virtues that require freedom from fear (Cicero, *Fin* iii 29; *Tusc*. v 41–2, 51–4). This argument rests partly on the Stoic doctrine that fear, like other passions, is to be rejected because it assents to what is in fact a non-preferred indifferent as an evil. If this means "evil overall," it is clear why bravery excludes the passion of fear. But if fear may consist in the assent to a non-preferred indifferent as a pro tanto evil, it is not clear why the brave person must be without it. Whatever we say about fear, it is not clear that this argument excludes non-moral pro tanto goods. If fear requires assent to an indifferent's being evil overall, Aristotle does not admit that the virtuous person fears non-moral evils. If it only requires assent to an indifferent's being a pro tanto evil, the Stoics have no conclusive reason to exclude it from bravery.

Here as elsewhere, it is useful to recall that Chrysippus sometimes reads Aristotle carefully and sympathetically. His remarks about Aristotle on virtue and pleasure, and about the treatment of indifferents as goods and evils, show that he grasps aspects of Aristotle's position that raise serious questions for the Stoics. It is worth our while to bear these questions in mind when we try to understand and to evaluate the Stoics' disagreements with Aristotle.

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Notes

1. Both Strabo and Plutarch tell a curious story that purports to explain this obscurity. According to this story, Aristotle's works were stored in a cave in Scepsis and were not read until Sulla obtained them. (See Strabo xiii 1.55; Plutarch, *Sulla* 26.1–2.) This story may be an exaggeration, but the fact that it could be told suggests that references to Aristotle in Hellenistic philosophers were not numerous enough to make it obvious that his works were generally available. We cannot tell whether this suggestion is true since, apart from some complete texts of Epicurus, we have only fragments of Greek philosophical texts from the Hellenistic period, and we cannot examine complete texts of later Peripatetics or earlier Stoics to see how they interacted, or what they said or did not say about Aristotle. On knowledge of Aristotle among Hellenistic philosophers, see Barnes 1997. See also White, this volume.

2. See Long, this volume.

3. In the last half-century, the study of Stoic ethics in relation to Aristotle has set out from Long 1968. The title of this paper was provocative, and it provoked a reply in Sandbach's skeptical discussion of Stoic knowledge of Aristotle (Sandbach 1985). A convincing critique of Sandbach is presented in Inwood 1986. On Aristotle's ethics in particular, see Nielsen 2012: chapter 1.

4. "Then to sum up, Cleinias, I said, it seems that in all those things which we said at first were good, the question is not how they themselves by themselves are by nature good (*auta ge kath'hauta pephuken agatha*), but this is the point, it seems. If folly leads them, they are greater evils than their opposites, to the extent that they are more able to serve the leader which is evil. If intelligence leads, and wisdom, they are greater goods. But themselves by themselves neither lot are worth anything at all.—It seems to be so, as you say, he said.—Then what follows from what has been said? That none of the things is either good or evil, but of these two wisdom is good, and ignorance evil.—He agreed.—Then let us consider what remains, I said. Since we are all eager to be happy, and we have been shown to be happy by using things and using them correctly, and correctness and good fortune were provided by knowledge, what seems, then, to be necessary, is that every man in every way tries to become as wise as possible. Is not that correct?—Yes, he said" (*Euthd*. 281d–282a). Translations are mine, except when otherwise stated.

5. This passage has been discussed by Vlastos 1991: chapter 8; Long 1988; Jones 2013.

6. See Kamtekar, this volume and Klein, this volume.

7. Sometimes prima facie is used, perhaps confusingly, to express what I have expressed with pro tanto. Sometimes "on the whole" and "all things considered" are used to express what I have expressed with "overall." But these phrases may also be used to express different ideas. I omit further complications that may arise.

8. Failure to consider all the relevant aspects of the situation may cause us to believe falsely that something is good without qualification (*DA* 433b5–10). Here Aristotle—in line with his consistent but sometimes confusing use of "without qualification"—uses "good without qualification" to refer to an overall good, whereas he uses it elsewhere (e.g., *EN* 1129b1–6) for a pro tanto good.

9. The text and translation of Plutarch mostly follow Cherniss 1976.

10. *Comm. not*. 1070d attributes the same claim about pleasure as good and as end to Chrysippus in *On Justice*.

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11. Others suppose that Plutarch refers to the *Protrepticus*. Sandbach 1985: 14 says, "Plutarch reports a criticism of an Aristotelian opinion on justice that is not to be found in the Corpus. No doubt it was in some exoteric work." Gourinat 2019: 343–4 points out that Plutarch's testimony does not correspond to any passage in the surviving ethical treatises and infers that it draws on a lost work of Aristotle. The inference is unwarranted.

12. A speculative reconstruction of *On Justice* is presented by Moraux 1957.

13. I have not said that the view that Chrysippus attributes to Aristotle fits either *EE* or *MM*. I leave aside further questions that arise here. Cf. Nielsen 2012: 20–1.

14. The extent of Chrysippus's concession to the hedonists depends on the force of "according to them" (*kat' autous*) at 1040f. Cherniss translates "Nothing in their theory would prevent …," so that Chrysippus endorses what he goes on to say about

the virtues. But we might at least as plausibly take *kat' autous* to govern the rest of the sentence, so that Chrysippus describes what the hedonists say about the virtues, not what he thinks they are right to say.

15. See Asmis, this volume.

16. von Arnim (in *SVF*) supposes a lacuna after "does not go astray at random" (*mê allôs apoplanômenos*). Cherniss accepts Sandbach's conjectural supplement (of which I cannot trace the source), which is a variation on von Arnim's *apodechoimeth' hôs*. Pohlenz (in the Teubner edition) prefers "*ou katagnôsteon* vel sim," which would explain the genitive without adding *hôs*, and would be weaker than the endorsement that is suggested by the other supplements.

17. See Kamtekar, this volume and Klein, this volume.

18. To see what Chrysippus really suggests or concedes, we need to look more closely at the position he attributes to his opponents (i.e., those to whom he concedes something). The "distinctions" that he mentions are the differences between preferred and non-preferred that Ariston denied (DL vii 160). Chrysippus, then, is considering those who are so impressed by these differences between, for example, health and sickness that they call health good and sickness bad. In (2) he says what they are doing in calling these things (*pragmata*) good and bad. They are directed toward "these things," which are probably "the significates" (*tois sêmainomenois*), according to the standard Stoic use of *pragma* for what is signified (so Cherniss). Cf. Sextus, *M.* viii 11. A reference to signification is appropriate at this point, since we want to know not only what words these people use, but what they mean by them. (We might also take the *pragmata* to be the "distinctions" [so LS, vol. 2 on 58H], or the preferred and dispreferred indifferents themselves; but either of these choices makes this sentence merely repeat what has preceded.) The *pragmata*—i.e., the senses that these people attach to "good" and "bad"—are probably the senses normally attached to "good" and "bad." Chrysippus considers people who think the differences between preferred and dispreferred indifferents are great enough to justify the use of "good" and "bad" in the ordinary sense. They know what they are saying and are not just using the words "good" and "bad" loosely or carelessly—that would be the "pointless wandering" that Chrysippus rules out. In Cherniss's view, the relevant senses are those that the Stoics attach to "preferred" and "dispreferred." This may also be the point in Kidd 1955. This explanation makes Chrysippus's concession trivial and boring. If by "good" I simply mean "preferred," I am not disagreeing in substance with the Stoic position. But I might equally use "even" and "odd" or "round" and "square," to express my agreement with the Stoics, if I meant by them exactly what they mean by "preferred" and "dispreferred." This concession is too trivial to be worth mentioning.

19. See Mitsis, this volume and O'Keefe, this volume.

p. 508 20. See Wynne, this volume.

21. This argument from misuse also appears in Plutarch, *Stoic. repugn.* 1048cd.

22. For this purpose it does not matter that the Stoics do not accept (2), if the argument is meant to proceed from non-Stoic premisses to a Stoic conclusion. The argument is discussed by Brennan 2005: 132, who rejects discussion of the argument in LS, vol. 1: 358, with which I agree.

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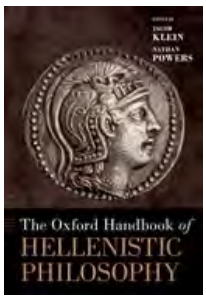
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CHAPTER

22 Stoicism Comes to Rome: A Century of Modest Change

Brad Inwood

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Abstract

This chapter considers the relationship between Stoicism and Rome in its first century, from the middle of the second century BCE to the ’40s BCE, a period when groundwork was laid for the more complicated developments in Roman Stoicism after the end of the republican era. The chapter focuses on two themes: philosophical developments within the school itself, traced through the crucial figures of Antipater of Tarsus, Panaetius, Hecaton, and Posidonius of Rhodes; and the interaction of Stoic philosophers with members of Rome’s political and cultural elite. Despite ambitious claims scholars have made in the past, it seems there was little substantial connection between the content of Stoic doctrine and distinctive features of Roman culture. Roman culture did not have much impact on Stoic thought at the time; nor did Stoicism at that stage have much appreciable influence on the culture of Rome’s political class (with the notable exception of Cicero).

Keywords: Stoicism, Rome, Roman culture, Antipater of Tarsus, Panaetius, Hecaton, Posidonius, Cicero

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The relationship between Stoicism and Rome has long interested historians of ancient thought and culture. In this chapter, I consider this relationship in its first century, from the middle of the second century BCE to the ’40s BCE, a period when the groundwork was laid for the more complicated developments that followed in Rome after the end of the republican era. I will focus on two particular themes: philosophical developments within the school itself; and the interaction of Stoic philosophers with Roman culture, essentially in the form of their relationships with members of Rome’s political and cultural elite. There were certainly significant developments on both fronts; but despite some very ambitious claims that have been made in the past, particularly about the interaction between Panaetius’s philosophical doctrines and elite Roman culture, it seems there was little substantial connection between the content of Stoic doctrine and distinctive features of

Roman culture.[1] Roman culture did not have much impact on Stoic thought at the time; nor did Stoicism at this stage have much appreciable influence on the culture of Rome's political class, as is sometimes alleged (with one notable exception, the influence it had on Cicero).

1. Introduction

Stoicism grew and changed throughout its long history, but the third head of the school, Chrysippus (c. 280–205 BCE), developed a comprehensive version of the school's doctrines that became dominant during his lifetime and for many decades after his death.[2] This relative doctrinal stability was no doubt encouraged by the fact that the next two heads of the school, Zeno of Tarsus (scholarch from about 205 BCE to perhaps 185 BCE) and Diogenes of Babylon (who lived from about 240 to about 150 BCE), had both been his students. Beginning
p. 510 in the middle of the second century BCE, two ↳ developments converged to disrupt what we might call the Chrysippean consensus. First, the Academic Carneades, head of the school Plato founded but a staunch adherent of its then-current skeptical agenda, subjected many aspects of the consensus to powerful dialectical critiques.[3] (The importance to Carneades of focusing on Chrysippus's synthesis is reflected in his claim that, "if it weren't for Chrysippus, I wouldn't even be here!" [Diogenes Laertius 4.62].)[4] The second factor was the increasing geographical dispersal of the school's activity. Although there had long been local schools of Stoic philosophy outside Athens, in the second century BCE Rhodes in particular emerged as home to some of the more important Stoics.[5] (This was long before the Roman conquest of Athens in 86 BCE during the Mithridatic War, an event that decisively dethroned Athens as a major center of philosophical activity.)

There was another important development in the mid second century, one of a more strictly philosophical character. Beginning with Diogenes's successor, Antipater of Tarsus, Stoics became much more engaged with Plato's philosophy and to a lesser extent with that of Aristotle.[6] This may have been in part a result of Carneades's dialectic; Sedley has suggested that it began with an effort to defend Stoicism against the troublesome Academic by arguing that key Stoic doctrines had already been held by Plato himself.[7] As we will see, this is particularly likely as a motivation for Antipater's book *That According to Plato Only the Fine is Good* (Clement *Strom*. 5.14 = *SVF* 3sv56).

These factors contributed to the emergence of a notable degree of innovation and pluralism within the school in the late second and early first centuries BCE.[8] One result was that the divergent tendencies within the school became well enough defined that in later centuries they could be still recalled and labeled: Athenaeus (5.2) calls them Diogeneans, Antipatrists, and Panaetians. (It has long been recognized that Panaetius was an innovator, but as we shall see later in this chapter, in Book 3 of *De Officiis* Cicero also clearly presents Diogenes and Antipater as having opposed approaches to the key topic of moral deliberation, which indicates at least one area in which they contributed to divergences within the school.) Hence, at the time when Stoicism began to interact in a significant way with Roman literary and political culture, it was already in a relatively pluralistic and flexible condition, a contrast to the earlier Chrysippean consensus.

Rome's expansion into the eastern Mediterranean since the early second century BCE brought new opportunities for Greek intellectuals, including Stoics, to interact with elite Roman culture. Interaction with cultures outside mainland Greece was nothing new for Stoicism, which had begun its long trek through history when the Greek world was expanding dramatically to the east. The founder, Zeno, was from Cyprus, a melting pot of Greek and Phoenician cultures; one of his students went to the court of Antigonus Gonatas and another to that of Ptolemy in Alexandria.[9] Indeed, most leading members of the school came from outside mainland Greece: some from cities that had long had Greek culture, such as Cleanthes from Assos and Panaetius from Rhodes, but many of them from the regions conquered or consolidated by Alexander the Great and his successors. Chrysippus, for example, and many of his successors (including Antipater) were from southern Asia
p. 511 Minor, and Diogenes was from the new Greek city of Seleukeia in Mesopotamia. But the expansion of Roman

↳ military and cultural power in the Mediterranean opened up an even wider area for Stoic philosophy—as for all schools of philosophy. Influential Romans came to Greece and philosophers of all kinds went to Rome, and these activities increased over time.[10] The fact of interaction between Greek philosophers and Roman culture was obvious. It is more difficult to assess how much influence this process had on the content of Roman culture or on the philosophy itself.

Although this process was gradual, 155 BCE provides us with a convenient focus. In that year, the most prominent philosophers in Athens (the Peripatetic Critolaus, the Stoic Diogenes, and the Academic Carneades) were sent to Rome on a diplomatic mission.[11] While there they all gave public lectures on philosophy which had a powerful impact on the educated elite; no doubt each argued for the merits of his own doctrines, but Carneades, having none, critiqued the others and demonstrated his ability to speak persuasively on both sides of any given issue. Some more conservative Romans were perhaps happy to see such disruptive influences leave town, but the seed of philosophical debate had been planted.[12] Some awareness of Greek philosophy had certainly been in the air beforehand (so much so that an expulsion of philosophers was ordered in 161 BCE), but from then on, the connections between Greek philosophers and the Roman political class grew apace[13]. For example, within a few decades the Stoic Panaetius (on whom see §2.2) would be found visiting Rome, following in the footsteps of his father, Nicagoras, who had himself been a Rhodian ambassador to Rome as a member of the pro-Roman, anti-Macedonian party.[14] When Panaetius visited Rome, then, it was not as a disruptive philosopher but as a trusted adviser and companion of the Roman general and politician Scipio Aemilianus.[15] This relationship was no doubt facilitated by the fact that Panaetius's social standing in his city was comparable to the position of Scipio in Rome and that Rhodes was already one of the most pro-Roman of Greek states.[16]

In what follows, I offer sketches of the most prominent figures of late Hellenistic Stoicism, with emphasis both on their distinctive contributions to the Stoic philosophical tradition and on their engagement with leading figures in Roman society.

2. The Late Hellenistic Stoics

2.1. Antipater

Consideration of the developments in Stoicism should begin with Antipater, the Stoic who first engaged robustly with the challenges posed by Carneades. He was active in the middle years of the second century BCE (and died in 130/129 BCE).[17] Later writers testify to his struggle to respond to the brilliant Academic. Cicero asked (*Acad. Post*. Book 1 fr. [Nonius p. 65] = *SVF* 3sv4), "And why does Antipater fight to the finish with Carneades in so many books?" Plutarch's subsequent report (*Garrul.* 23 (514cd) = *SVF* 3sv5) is perhaps biased toward his own Platonist school:

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> Excessive chatter is less irksome when it is on some scholarly topic. But people of that disposition must get used both to doing a bit of writing and to undertaking some dialectic personally. The Stoic Antipater, it seems, was neither willing nor able to come to grips directly with Carneades in his fluent and voluble attacks on the Stoic school; instead, Antipater wrote and filled volumes with replies to Carneades, and so was nicknamed "Ink-bellower."

The later Platonist Numenius (fr. 26 in Eusebius *Praep. Ev.* 14.8.10–11 = *SVF* 3sv6) presents an even more dismal picture of Antipater's efforts, and claims (no doubt inaccurately) that he could not even get books written to express his opposition to Carneades:

> Carneades' ideas always won out and no one else's ever did, since his opponents were quite incompetent public speakers. His contemporary Antipater, at any rate, undertook to struggle to write something but never published anything directed against the stream of arguments produced on a daily basis by Carneades. He said not a word, nothing, not in the schools and not in the public porticoes, and no one ever heard a peep out of him. He waved around the threat of a written reply and sat in a corner writing books to leave for later generations to read. His books were feeble then and even more so now against Carneades, who manifestly was and was recognized at the time as a force of nature.

But though Antipater's replies may not have been dialectically sharp and were perhaps effectively confined to his books, he was no philosophical victim. As we have seen, he devoted three books to proving that in ethics Plato was a Stoic avant la lettre, holding that only the fine (*kalon*) is good, among other Stoic doctrines.[18] A less partisan assessment might show that Plato was in fact ambivalent about the scope of the good, but the dialogues do provide reasonable encouragement for the Stoicizing interpretation.[19]

Antipater also pushed back against Carneades's criticisms of the way Stoics formulated the *telos* or goal of life—a key doctrinal issue for philosophers in the eudaimonist tradition.[20] We are told by Clement that, following Diogenes (who proposed the formula "to be rational in the selection of what is according to nature and rejection [of the opposite]"), Antipater tried a couple of versions: "to live continuously selecting things that are according to nature and rejecting things contrary to nature" and "to do everything in one's power continuously and unswervingly in order to achieve the dominant natural things" (Stobaeus *Ecl*. 2.76.6–15 = *SVF* 3sv57). At least the second of these was an effort to avoid the charge that the Stoics had two goals, rather than one: the pursuit of virtue and the pursuit of preferred indifferents.[21] Stoic efforts to formulate their *telos* in an Academic-proof way continued among Antipater's successors. Elsewhere (Clement *Strom*. 2.21.129 = LS 63J) we are told:

> And in addition to this Panaetius claimed that living according to the starting points given to us by nature is the goal. In addition to them all, Posidonius said that it was living in contemplation of the truth and order of the universe, helping as much as possible to bring it about and in no respect being led astray by the irrational part of ↳ the soul. And some of the younger Stoics defined it thus: the end is living in agreement with the constitution of man.

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It seems clear that Diogenes was not himself responding to Academic critiques, but afterward, from Antipater on, various Stoics in our period tried a range of strategies to clarify and simplify their view in order to block the charge of having two goals.[22] Antipater refined the formulation based on selection of (or best efforts to select) preferred indifferents; Panaetius and the younger Stoics emphasized action in accordance with our innate human constitution and inclinations; and Posidonius reverted to an emphasis on the relationship of the agent to the cosmos, adding the qualification that we should not be distracted by any of our irrational inclinations (which may also have been a result of his acceptance of some Platonic or Aristotelian insights about human psychology). Antipater, then, in responding to Carneades, seems to have opened the door to quite a bit of Stoic innovation in ethics.

Antipater also diverged from his teacher Diogenes concerning the nature of justice; on this question, there is no obvious reason to suspect Academic influence. According to Cicero in Book 3 of *De Officiis* (especially 3.50–7) Antipater systematically disagreed with Diogenes about the way to apply the concept of justice in complex and difficult practical situations. Whereas Diogenes held that it was legitimate to pursue one's own interest over that of someone else, as long as the law and other explicit commitments were observed, Antipater held that justice required that in every case we take into account our social nature and the attendant obligation to look out for the interests of our fellow human beings, even at the cost of our own well-being. Cicero imagines the debate like this (*Off*. 3.52–3). Diogenes claims that minimal observation of the law is sufficient. Antipater replies:

> What is that you say? You are supposed to be concerned for people and serve the interests of human society; you were born on specific terms and have natural principles to obey and follow which prescribe that your utility is general utility and conversely that general utility is your utility. Will you then conceal from people the advantages and opportunities that are available to them?

And Diogenes's reaction would be like this:

> Concealment is one thing and silence is something different. I am not concealing something from you if I do not tell you what the nature of the gods is or what the highest good is, and yet knowing these things would be much more useful to you than cheap wheat. But it is not obligatory for me to tell you everything that it is useful for you to hear.

Antipater:

> On the contrary, it *is* obligatory, at least if you bear in mind that human society is connected by nature.

Diogenes:

> I have not forgotten, but surely the society you are talking about is not incompatible with private property. If it were, then we would not sell anything; we would have to give it all away!

Cicero, whose own inclinations were closer to Antipater's, cites the aristocrat Quintus Scaevola as adhering to this loftier conception of justice, whereas one of Panaetius's students, Hecaton of Rhodes, claimed (in a book dedicated to another Roman aristocrat, Quintus Tubero) that a dedication to one's personal prosperity along the lines favored by Diogenes was perfectly just (*Off*. 3.63).

This exchange nicely illustrates two things. First, it underscores that the Stoics allowed wide scope for disagreement among themselves. There might be general agreement on broad principles, but also lots of room for debate about quite important particular issues. Second, it shows how complicated the question of Stoic influence on Roman culture and the converse really is. Here, Cicero reports a debate between two Stoic scholarchs who lived in the previous century, a debate that arose independently of any interaction with Romans. But he also weaves that debate into his own thinking about how a proper Roman ought to behave and goes out of his way to entangle this philosophical issue with well-known members of the Roman elite. Scaevola was not taking a position in the philosophical debate, but Cicero manages to present him as opposing the views of a Greek Stoic who is not otherwise known to have frequented Rome.[23] A skilled narrator, Cicero leaves us with the impression of Romans and Greek philosophers in debate, but it is an impression that fades when scrutinized closely.

To return to Antipater: one of his "associates" was the nobleman Blossius, a politically active man from the Italian town of Cumae, who was associated with the populist Roman tribune Tiberius Gracchus. After the latter's land reform policies led to his violent and premature death, Blossius fled to Asia Minor; there he eventually committed suicide after the failure of further political reform plans (Plutarch *Tib. Gr.* 8.6, 20.5–7). Blossius has often been regarded as a Stoic philosopher, but Plutarch says merely that he was an associate (*sunêthês*) of Antipater and that Antipater honored him by dedicating several books to him.[24] This looks much more like an example of the growing trend among Greek philosophers to cultivate influential Romans than it does like a serious philosophical relationship among intellectual peers. But it has nevertheless contributed to the picture of close intellectual relationships among Greek philosophers and Roman statesmen in the second and first centuries BCE—a picture dear to Cicero's heart but not well supported by our other evidence.[25]

If Blossius was not a serious philosophical student of Antipater, what of his other students, of whom there were many? The most prominent, of course, was his eventual successor, Panaetius of Rhodes. Others were less influential: his countryman Heraclides of Tarsus and no doubt many of the next generation of Stoics such as

Apollonides of Smyrna, Chrysermos of Alexandria, perhaps even Dardanus, named by Cicero as one of the key
p. 515 Stoics in the period after Panaetius, and Apollodorus of Athens.[26] Of these other ↳ figures we know relatively little, but it is clear that Panaetius was not only a crucial figure in the development of Stoicism but also important for the question of its connection with Roman culture, owing to his relationship with Scipio Aemilianus.[27]

2.2. Panaetius

Panaetius's life is better known than that of most Greek philosophers of the period.[28] In the early second century BCE, he was born the eldest son of a prominent aristocratic family on Rhodes and throughout his life maintained his connections with his native city; he did not become a citizen of Athens despite becoming head of the Stoa there. After early experience typical of his class (including a year's service in the navy which brought him to Athens for the first time—significantly, after Crates's embassy to Rome on behalf of the pro-Roman Attalid monarch Eumenes II), he studied first in Pergamum (like Rhodes, an early ally of Rome) with the grammarian Crates of Mallos and, after 155 BCE, in Athens with both Diogenes and Antipater.[29] After 146 BCE and before he took over the headship of the Athenian school in 129 BCE, he spent a considerable amount of time in Rome in association with Scipio Aemilianus, dividing his time between the two cities (according to Philodemus's historical account of Stoicism).[30] Ancient legend notwithstanding, it is not right to regard him as the teacher of Scipio; their respective ages make that implausible.[31] But he did accompany Scipio on an official trip to Egypt and the east in 140–139 BCE.[32] We cannot be certain how intensely he associated with Scipio or what influence (if any) he might have had on him. But in 129 BCE, when both Scipio and Antipater died Panaetius returned to Athens to take up the headship of the Stoic school, which he held until his death about 20 years later, around 110 BCE. Sedley argues persuasively that Panaetius was the last head of the official school in Athens.[33] This is confirmed by the fact that his most important student, Posidonius, did not teach there, preferring to work in Rhodes, where a Stoic school was left thriving upon Panaetius's death.

As we saw (in §2.1), Panaetius's teacher Antipater had changed the direction of Stoic philosophy by grappling with the dialectical challenge posed by Carneades and arguing that Plato himself had held views that the Stoics maintained while the Academy turned to skepticism. Panaetius took this process further in several ways. He was certainly more open about his admiration for Plato (Cicero *Tusc. Disp.* 1.79); and if Gourinat is right he even did extensive editorial work on the text of Plato's dialogues.[34] This does not mean that he agreed with Plato's central ideas. One source tells us that Panaetius claimed that Plato's *Phaedo* (which argues for the soul's immortality) must be inauthentic, no doubt because Panaetius himself held that the soul was mortal.[35] We have some reason to believe that Panaetius may have acknowledged some functional divisions in the soul's powers that mirror the Platonic and Aristotelian doctrine that the soul has an irrational component.[36] At the same time there is strong evidence that Panaetius reworked quite extensively the earlier Stoic doctrine on the parts of the soul and the boundary between soul and the lower powers in human beings.[37] The effect on Panaetius of his
p. 516 increased engagement with the philosophers of the fourth century BCE is also evident in physics ↳ and cosmology. He was explicit about doubting the doctrine of conflagration—a move that entails dramatic changes in cosmogony and cosmology—and a revisionist about the key doctrine of divination. Taken together, these changes strongly suggest a more Aristotelian approach to physical doctrines, rather than the direct influence of Platonic ideas.[38] There is controversy about how much of *De Officiis* can be attributed to Panaetius.[39] Nevertheless, Panaetius seems also to have reworked earlier Stoic doctrines on the virtues, arguing that the four cardinal virtues of Plato and Aristotle could be shown to develop out of human nature by the developmental process which the Stoics labeled *oikeiôsis*.[40] One of Panaetius's signature doctrines, the theory of the four "roles" (Greek *prosôpa*, Latin *personae*), though anticipated in the early school, was articulated in a novel way that suggested greater interest in the practical application of the theory to concrete moral decision-making than in the more abstract and paradoxical doctrines of some of his predecessors.[41]

Taken together, these and other features of Panaetius's thought suggest an openness to significant recasting of earlier Stoic doctrine. His increased engagement with Platonic and (probably) Aristotelian philosophy must have contributed to this, but it is not the whole story. For Stoics had always engaged in a considerable degree of in-house argument and debate, and many of Panaetius's innovations are better interpreted in that light. Still, he must have come across as the most innovative head of the school at least since Chrysippus. Few of his students could emulate this degree of intellectual independence and innovation.

Though it is hard to find evidence of Stoic influence on Scipio, Tiberius Gracchus, or Tubero, the situation is perhaps somewhat different when we come to the most prominent and best documented Roman student of Panaetius: Publius Rutilius Rufus. Cicero not only tells us that he was a student of Panaetius but emphasizes his advanced grasp of Stoicism and his great learning, the fruit of much hard work (*Brutus* 113–4). According to his apparently younger fellow student, Posidonius, Rufus was so impressed by the quality of Panaetius's book on appropriate action (*kathêkon*) that he compared it to the "Venus of Cos" by the master painter Apelles. Rufus was born c. 154 and had an excellent training in law; he became consul in 105 BCE after a successful military and political career. Notable for his personal integrity and his criticism of emotional appeals in oratory (Cicero *De Oratore* 1.228–9), these features of his political persona are sometimes attributed to Stoic influence on him. That is certainly possible, although Rufus was an active member of the political elite and as such seems to have been involved in the usual range of Roman political trials, both as accuser and defendant. Stoic influence is not needed to explain his personal integrity nor his views about oratorical practice. When serving as a legate in Asia Minor (94–93 BCE), he curbed the extortionate greed of tax contractors, thereby earning their wrath. In revenge, they engineered against him a charge of extortion; at the eventual revenge trial in 92 BCE, Rufus opted for a minimalist, unemotional, Socratic approach to his defense, which predictably led to his conviction and exile. He was, apparently, welcomed by the very provincials he was alleged to have wronged, and he spent a comfortable old age writing his memoirs at Smyrna.[42]

p. 517 When one combines Rufus's study under Panaetius with his devotion to political principle, Socratic defense strategy, and resultant exile it is tempting to conclude that Stoic doctrine was a factor in his political and intellectual life. And it may be true that he is a better example of a Roman political leader inspired by Stoicism even than Cato the Younger, who normally gets the glory in this respect. But it would be a mistake to overstate the case. Aside from his exposure to Panaetius early in life, his intellectual formation was conventionally Roman and his reputation for a Socratic temperament may be the result of nothing more than his misguided strategy at trial. Cicero (*De Oratore* 1.228–33) emphasizes Rufus's determination to retain his manly dignity as much as his philosophical principle and it is clear that he was useful material for Cicero in working out the case for what he thought was the right kind of philosophical oratory for Roman political life. Cicero's interest in developing a paradigm of philosophy in public life is a factor to be reckoned with, but Rufus is, nevertheless, an important *exemplum* of Stoic influence on Roman political life and behavior.

Panaetius's most important students within the school both worked in Rhodes. Hecaton (like Panaetius himself) was a native of the city, and Posidonius had settled there after leaving his home city of Apamea in Syria.

2.3. Hecaton

Our biographical information about Hecaton is minimal. His dedication of *Peri kathêkontos* to a Roman, Quintus Aelius Tubero, does not establish that he ever visited Rome (though of course he might have), and it certainly does not mean that he was part of the so-called Scipionic circle.[43] But it does fit well into the established and growing trend for Greek intellectuals to network with wealthy and powerful Romans. There is no evidence to suggest that Tubero was affected by Hecaton's Stoic ideas. Though a student of the highly innovative Panaetius, Hecaton was himself quite conservative in his philosophical positions.[44] Diogenes does however report that Hecaton had a distinctive way of organizing thought about the virtues (DL 7.90–1):

> In book one of *On Virtues* Hecaton says that the virtues which consist in theorems are knowledge-based and theory-based (for example practical wisdom and justice). The non-theory-based are those which are understood by extension from those understood to consist in theorems (for example health and strength). For it turns out that health follows and is in extension from self-control, which is theory-based, just as strength supervenes on the building of a vault. They are called non-theory-based because they do not involve assent, and they also occur in base people; examples are health and courage.

In substance this is all quite conventional, though perhaps a Stoic purist might decline to use the honorific term "virtue" (*aretê*) for non-intellectual excellences. His conservatism is confirmed by his alignment with
p. 518 Diogenes against Antipater on the controversy ↳ about justice discussed earlier in this chapter, and by his views about slavery and the proper treatment of slaves as reported by Seneca. It seems clear that he became a source frequently relied on for doctrines in ethics, especially in connection with the question of how to determine what an appropriate (*kathêkon*) action is in difficult circumstances. Our information about this comes mostly from Cicero's *De Officiis* and Seneca's *De Beneficiis*, so we may assume that it is their own practical interests in those works that explains his prominence.[45] But there seems to be nothing particularly innovative about his actual views. It might seem that his relative prominence in Roman authors is explained by a distinctive pragmatic orientation in his ethics, but it is more likely that this is merely a case of sample bias: he happened to be an easily cited authority on issues that Cicero and Seneca cared about.

2.4. Posidonius

Posidonius was perhaps 20 years younger than Rufus. The dates of his birth and death are conjectural, but since he studied with Panaetius he must have been born no later than 130 BCE and he died most likely c. 50 BCE.[46] He was both steeped in the traditional doctrines of the Stoic school and enriched intellectually by an extensive engagement with Plato and Aristotle; in addition, Posidonius acquired a serious mastery of the mathematical sciences, something hitherto rare in the school. Having left his home in the Greek city of Apamea in Syria, he went to Athens to study with Panaetius. We do not know whether he met Rutilius Rufus there or elsewhere, but he certainly admired him. Not only did he report to Cicero Rufus's admiration of Panaetius's work, as a fellow student might well do, but Posidonius evidently took the trouble to excoriate Apicius, no doubt one of the tax collectors restrained by Rufus, for his greed and he blamed him for Rufus's exile (Athenaeus 168de Kaibel).

Probably during the '90s BCE, Posidonius traveled widely in the Mediterranean, going all the way to Gibraltar and surveying North Africa among other areas; but in the end he settled in Rhodes, where he headed the Stoic school, became a citizen, and was active in political life, holding the highest civic office (*prutanis*). During the Mithridatic War (87 or 86 BCE), he was an ambassador to Rome, no doubt pledging Rhodes's loyalty to Rome, with whom it had long been allied. The contrast with Athens, which went over to Mithridates, was striking: Athens was conquered and sacked by Sulla, while Rhodes remained a prosperous and successful ally of the winning side. Posidonius welcomed powerful Roman politicians in his school. Cicero attended his lectures in 77 BCE and remained a friend. The great general Pompey visited him twice, in 66 and 62 BCE, while campaigning in the east. Cicero reports that on the latter occasion Posidonius was laid up with arthritis but nevertheless lectured impromptu for his distinguished guest.[47] As an old man he made one final visit to Rome in 51 BCE, no doubt on diplomatic business once again.

Posidonius's influence on the powerful Romans with whom he interacted seems to have been quite limited,
p. 519 with the exception of Cicero, who refers to him frequently in ↳ his philosophical works and in his correspondence. From the letters we learn that the philosopher declined Cicero's invitation to write at length about his exploits as consul (*ad Atticum* 2.1.2); Posidonius had in fact written about Pompey, but by means of well calculated flattery he seems to have avoided arousing Cicero's jealously.[48] Posidonius clearly knew how to

be diplomatic with the important Romans he dealt with, but seems not to have influenced Roman political life, except in his role as a leading political figure in Rhodes. However, his impact on intellectuals was significant. In addition to Cicero, Varro learned a great deal from his works; and his influence was considerable in the early imperial period. He was an influence on Seneca's *Natural Questions*, perhaps mostly through his follower Asclepiodotus, and Cleomedes followed him extensively in his astronomical work. His school on Rhodes was continued by his grandson Jason of Nysa, who seems to have specialized in biographical and historical works.[49]

This is not the place for a comprehensive survey of Posidonius's philosophical work.[50] In the present context it is best to focus on the general characteristics of his philosophical work against the background of his predecessors. The most important point to make concerns his conservatism. Though in the past he was often regarded as a great innovator in various areas of Stoic philosophy, this interpretation has now been rejected. In most respects Posidonius hewed close to the line of the Chrysippean consensus, with small adjustments of the sort that appear regularly in Stoicism without obscuring the general consistency of the school. Hence, it is noteworthy that in the doxography of Diogenes Laertius he is generally cited alongside Chrysippus for basic points of physical and cosmological theory and seldom credited with a position in conflict with Chrysippean views. To be sure, there are reformulations of basic school doctrines—unsurprising, given the passage of time and the changing intellectual climate of the first century BCE. But there are no departures like those which Panaetius undertook when he denied conflagration (which entailed a number of further changes in cosmogony and cosmology) and doubted divination. In fact, we learn from Cicero that Posidonius was a particularly keen exponent of the validity of a wide range of divinatory practices.

An example of a minor tweak in physical theory concerns the nature of the void outside our cosmos. Earlier Stoics had held that it was "indefinite" or "infinite" (*apeiron*), but Posidonius claimed that it was only just big enough to accommodate the expansion that accompanies conflagration (Aëtius 2.9.3).[51] Many scholars see this as a revision to Chrysippus's theory, but this may well be too strong a claim. If one interprets the earlier view as a claim that the external void is indefinite, rather than infinite, on the grounds that it is impossible to make a definite claim about its size, then it is tempting to regard Posidonius's view as a correction to this vague view made by specifying the principle by which its size could be determined.[52] On Posidonius's theory, the size of the void is still not definitely determined, but neither is it left uselessly vague. His sensitivity to questions about the size of cosmological entities fits well with his well-documented concern to provide definite calculations of the sizes and distances of many astronomical and meteorological phenomena. In this case too, Posidonius would be making the size of the void as precise as it could be by at least giving a criterion for its magnitude, while still leaving it indefinite owing to the limitations of our observations.[53]

Posidonius's main departures in the area of physics were in fact additions to the work of his predecessors, rather than disagreements with them. He devoted a great deal of energy to the more specific natural phenomena that generally fell under the heading of "meteorology"—these include atmospheric phenomena, subterranean phenomena, and geographical phenomena. In dealing with such matters, he drew on as wide a range of empirically observed data as possible. In both geography and astronomy, which he dealt with in an integrated fashion, he relied heavily on the mathematical, specifically geometrical, expertise which he had acquired. Relatedly, he took an interest in methodological questions about the relationship between physical and mathematical aspects of natural philosophy. In all of these respects it is impossible not to see the influence of Aristotelian natural philosophy as well as the views of Aristotle and others on the role of mathematics in explaining the natural world. Strabo's famous comment on this aspect of Posidonius's approach can be cited here (Strabo 2.3.8):

> So much, then, in response to Posidonius. Much of it will get appropriate treatment in particular contexts, that is, the bits that relate to geography. As for what concerns natural philosophy, it needs to be considered elsewhere or not even bothered with. For there is in him a great deal of causal

> explanation and of Aristotelianism, which our [Stoic] school tends to avoid because the causes are hidden.

These remarks immediately follow Strabo's critique of Posidonius's views on zones, continents and other geographical issues, and in particular his critique of Posidonius's views on whether it is necessary to emend the text of Homer in order to secure his authority for what seemed to be the correct view on a problem. It is worth noting that Strabo, speaking as a member of a Stoic school, attributes the general Stoic lack of interest in Aristotelian-style etiology to an epistemological and methodological challenge, the hiddenness of causes. Posidonius's methodological innovations (wider empirical evidence gathering and the application of mathematical methods) enable him to expand the range of Stoic physics without departing from the doctrines of his predecessors.

But Posidonius's engagement with Aristotle is important in another way as well. We learn from Simplicius that, in demarcating the distinct contributions of natural philosophy and mathematical astronomy, Posidonius "based his account on Aristotle."[54] Similar issues about the demarcation of various intellectual activities come up often in Posidonius.[55] In Letter 88, Seneca reports on his views about the relationship between the "liberal arts" and philosophy, an issue that comes up again at length in Letter 90. We know that he had distinctive views about the relationships among the parts of philosophy (logic, physics, and ethics).[56] All of this suggests a strong interest in methodological and meta-philosophical questions; he was certainly not the first Stoic to have such interests, but it seems to an area in which he felt comfortable advancing his own distinctive views.

In these ways, then, Posidonius expanded the range of earlier Stoic philosophy and updated it without making important changes in core doctrines. Similarly, his substantial historical work (in at least 49 books) was the
p. 521 first such work by a Stoic. Posidonius's ↳ enormous range of interests and writings was no doubt responsible for the fact that in the decades that followed other Stoics also wrote on a wider range of themes: geography (Strabo), astronomy (Geminus, Manilius, and Cleomedes), and meteorology (Asclepiodotus and Seneca). His teacher Panaetius had in fact innovated more substantially, but evidently Posidonius's contribution was by way of consolidating long-standing Stoic theory and the integration of it with new subject matter.

This general characterization of Posidonius is, however, threatened in one area. According to the physician Galen, Posidonius undertook major innovations in psychology, adopting a broadly Platonic/Aristotelian theory of soul partition that disagreed on a point of central importance with Chrysippus. For his own polemical purposes, Galen claims in his *Doctrines of Plato and Hippocrates* (Books 4–5) that Posidonius rejected Chrysippus's highly cognitivist view of the soul and instead adopted a Platonizing tripartition. Though Galen does not claim that in Posidonius the three "parts" (desire, spirit, reason) are spatially separated as they are in Plato's *Timaeus* he does attempt to prove that in the interests of giving proper explanations of psychological phenomena Posidonius essentially adopted the moral psychology advanced in Book 4 of the *Republic*. Galen's claim of substantial revisionism in a core Stoic doctrine has been highly controversial, to say the least, but in recent years there has been a growing consensus that Galen drastically overstates any innovations that Posidonius may have made. A reliable summary account of the controversy is given by Algra, who provides a powerful argument in favor of some version of the view that Posidonius's innovations were relatively minor corrections.[57] If Algra and others are right, the motivation for the changes was characteristically Posidonian, in that he made only those changes that he thought were required to give a workable causal explanation of certain psychological phenomena concerned with the passions which Chrysippus had (by his own admission, at least according to Galen at *PHP* 5.6.29) been unable to accommodate fully.[58] On this view, Posidonius made room in the unified material soul for a disturbingly passive feature (a *pathêtikon*) that helped to account for the vulnerability of the soul to external influences and for its entropic tendency to weaken in its activities over time if not actively sustained by ongoing rational efforts. If he drew his examples from Plato, it was no doubt in order to show that his revised Stoic theory could accommodate the cases that Plato thought were proof of his

own tripartite theory, in line with Antipater's attempt to co-opt Plato's dialogues as forerunners of Stoic doctrine.

It is, of course, hard to prove that this is the right story about Posidonius's innovations in moral psychology, since Galen is our only source. But it fits well with Posidonius's general stance within the school (as discussed earlier in this chapter), makes sense of what we are told about Posidonian psychology in other sources, such as Plutarch and Cicero, and (even more importantly) is compatible with the basic tenets of Stoic physics. The soul is a material entity like any other, and that means that it has an active and a passive aspect to it. Posidonius has merely, on this view, focused his attention on the passive aspect of the soul and used it to account for phenomena that Chrysippus's theory had trouble with. Perhaps Chrysippus's problem was that in an ethical
p. 522 context he focused one-sidedly on the soul as the active principle relative to the body and so glossed ↳ over its passive aspect. Posidonius, in taking full account of the soul's passive aspect, would just be correcting a troublesome oversight by Chrysippus by means of a more consistent application of his own theory. His solution to the problem may well have had further implications.[59] But even so it leaves us with a Posidonius who is remarkably consistent in his stance within the school: fundamentally conservative, even more than his teacher Panaetius, but inspired by Aristotle and even Plato to solve problems internal to Stoicism without departing from centrally important doctrines (as he would be doing if Galen were right).

If something like this is the right story about Posidonius's psychology, we should pause to compare it with a similar innovation by Panaetius. I have argued at length elsewhere that the major changes introduced by Panaetius to the structure of the soul—some functions were to be shifted from soul (*psuchê*) to nature (*phusis*)—were intended to improve on the Chrysippean division by taking better account of how those functions operated in practice.[60] If that analysis is right, Panaetius perceived problems in Chrysippus's theory not in its fundamentals, but in the extreme degree to which he was committed to a fully rational model of the soul. These problems could best be solved not by abandoning the basic Stoic theory but by modifications to it within the framework of Stoic doctrine, modifications suggested by the need to give a superior explanation of how the soul is perceived to operate. Posidonius, on the interpretation advanced by Tieleman and Algra and adopted here, will have been motivated similarly but related his revised Stoic psychology to Platonic and Aristotelian theories in a way that invited Galen's uncharitable and polemical interpretation.

With Posidonius we can bring the consideration of the coming of Stoicism to Rome to an end. It seems very much as though the Athenian school was effectively closed by Sulla's sack of Athens in 86 BCE; this left the school in Rhodes, Rome's political ally, as the main center of Stoic philosophical activity under the leadership of Posidonius. And this school itself faded in importance not long after the death of Posidonius in midcentury. (The school continued to operate under his grandson but made no contribution to philosophical theory or debate.)

3. Conclusion

Let us step back and consider the main developments that took place during the first hundred years of interaction between Stoicism and Roman culture. In the first phase, two successive scholarchs, Diogenes and Antipater, confronted Carneades's multi-pronged dialectical attack on the doctrinal consensus forged by Chrysippus and his students. Diogenes was too old to respond with any real engagement, but adaptations and reformulations of Stoic doctrines were carried out by Antipater, first and foremost, and no doubt by other Stoics as well. Whether in epistemology, ethics, or physics, the changes were all part of this rather conventional inter-school sparring. It is difficult for us to judge who got the better of these debates, but the impact on Stoic
p. 523 philosophy ↳ was real. A further development was Antipater's attempt to co-opt Plato as an ally of Stoicism against the skeptics in his own school; this was no doubt impressive, even persuasive to some. Panaetius engaged even more than his predecessors with the Platonic corpus and with the growing importance of a revived Aristotelianism; he was a more adventurous philosopher than his teacher Antipater and the results included several significant changes in Stoic doctrine, mostly in physics but also in ethics.

In the next generation, Posidonius retrenched and expanded. He abandoned the most radical of his teacher's innovations—indeed, it is not clear that any of Panaetius's students followed him—but strengthened the school by greatly expanding both its scope and its depth.[61] Addressing areas of intellectual inquiry so far neglected by the school, integrating mathematical thinking and recent developments in astronomy, he laid a wider scientific foundation for the school's program and followed the lead of Aristotle in many respects. As for Plato and Platonism, if Tieleman is right Posidonius seems to have continued the attempt to co-opt Plato into his own Stoic framework, especially in the crucial area of psychology where, like his teacher, he made significant improvements to Chrysippus's theory in order to render it more explanatorily adequate to the phenomena of human life.[62] The Posidonian expansion and consolidation was an intellectual success; on many points he and his contemporaries became the benchmark for what counts as genuinely Stoic in the decades to come. But institutionally a kind of end had come. Neither in Athens nor even on Rhodes did a robust school survive; in the last half of the first century BCE and beyond, Stoicism became a scattered movement, without a tightly managed intellectual agenda. Its new, dispersed form may well have contributed to its success in the new Greco-Roman intellectual world that emerged after the Augustan consolidation of Roman power, but the centralized school of the Hellenistic era ended with the era itself.

And what can one say about the relationship between Roman political and cultural life and Stoicism in this period? Very little, I fear. The immediate impact of the embassy of 155 BCE may have been relatively small; Roman cultural leaders had already had a glimpse of Greek philosophy and it had begun to have an impact on the ruling class, though it is likely that Epicureanism was the more influential philosophy among aristocratic Romans.[63] In the next generations Panaetius, Posidonius, and others certainly interacted with Roman political and military leaders. But there is no reason to suppose that Panaetius had much influence on Scipio Aemilianus's policies and beliefs nor that the so-called Stoic Blossius of Cumae provided inspiration for Tiberius Gracchus. There is better reason to suppose that Rutilius Rufus's actions and public posture were influenced by his study with Panaetius, but the effect of any Stoic or Socratic inspiration on his political agenda was negligible or even negative. Socratic plain talk got him exiled and Roman political life was unaffected by his example. It is arguable indeed that Roman power had some influence on Stoicism, but only indirectly. Rhodes stayed true to Rome in the Mithridatic Wars while Athens did not; by midcentury, the Athenian school (already moribund) was closed, and the Rhodian school carried on for another generation under its brilliant and well-connected leader Posidonius. But it was a short reprieve.

p. 524 Stoicism's influence in Rome was not in the end so limited. Cato the Younger, perhaps following the example of the unfortunate Rufus, integrated Stoic elements into his political persona, aspiring to the image of a morally upstanding and uncompromisingly honest political leader. Because he was more important than Rufus and involved in more consequential developments in Roman political life, the image of Cato as a Stoic had greater

impact in the decades and centuries to come. But in the end he was no more effective, as he heroically backed the wrong horse in the civil wars, leaving only his integrity behind on the battlefield where he committed suicide in a lost cause.

Paradoxically, perhaps, the greatest impact of Stoicism on Roman culture in this period was not the work of a Roman Stoic. Cicero, an Academic to the end of his days, had a life-long fascination with Stoicism. He studied it early in life and late. He made it a key part of his constructed narrative about the relationship between oratory and philosophy, between pragmatism and principle. From the *De Oratore* at least until his final philosophical work, the *De Officiis*, Cicero the Academic provided Stoicism in Rome with a voice and an influence it might otherwise never have had. It was Cicero who ultimately paved the way for the later achievements of Stoicism in Rome.[64]

Notes

1. I am thinking of claims like that of Pohlenz 1948: 261 who holds that Panaetius developed his conception of an ethical ideal with reference to the character of Scipio; of Reale 1985: 291, who says that "the contact of Panaetius with the Roman mentality was fundamental as far as the revision of Stoic ethics" was concerned; of Morford 2002: 20, 25, 28, who holds that Panaetius introduced changes in Stoic ethics to make it more acceptable to the Roman elite; and Vimercati 2004: 5 who holds that various features of Panaetius's thought would not have been possible without the influence of Roman culture and that there was "a profound interpenetration" between "Panaetius' Greek reflection and Roman culture." For an authoritative view closer to what I argue for in this chapter, see Long 1974: 216.

2. Long, this volume.

3. Bett, this volume.

4. Translations from Greek and Latin are the author's own.

5. See Sedley 2003: 26–7.

6. Alexander of Aphrodisias *On Mixture and Growth*: chapter 3 (p. 216 Bruns) said that several Stoics of this period changed their views on mixture as a result of familiarity with Aristotle's doctrine on the topic. One of these was a student of Antipater, Sosigenes, quite possibly a contemporary of Panaetius. The influence of the Peripatetic Critolaus on Stoicism in this period is also significant. See Hahm 2007 and Inwood 2014c: chapter 3.

7. Sedley 2003: 20–4.

8. There had, however, always been robust debate within the school, most notably the disagreements between Aristo of Chios and Chrysippus in ethics. Aristo argued for a radical unity of virtues and, even more disruptive, contended that only ethics mattered in philosophy, with physics and logic being either unnecessary or actual distractions from the central task of philosophy. Chrysippus's success in imposing his more comprehensive and systematic approach on the school
p. 525 marginalized these Aristonian tendencies, but they ↳ were not extinguished. Not only did they persist among Cynics, who were often on the fringes of the Stoic school, but later Stoics such as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius continued to acknowledge Aristo's point of view.

9. Persaeus from Kition to the court of Antigonas; see Diogenes Laertius 7.6, 7.9. Sphaerus from Borysthenes to Alexandria; see Diogenes Laertius 7.177.

10. See Ferrary 2007: 37–46.

11. For an account of similar philosophical embassies and ambassadors, see Ferrary 2007.

12. Ferrary 2007: 25, 36–7.

13. Ferrary 2007: 32–3.

14. Haake 2007: 199.

15. And not as an apologist for Roman imperialism; see Ferrary 2007: 25–6.

16. Haake 2007: 198–205 provides a detailed account of Panaetius's illustrious family background, his career, and his relationship with Rome.

17. See Dorandi 1999: 51.

18. Clement *Strom*. 5.14 = *SVF* 3sv56: "Antipater the Stoic wrote three books on the theme 'that according to Plato only the honourable is good.' Antipater demonstrates that according to Plato virtue is sufficient for happiness. And he adds to this many other [Platonic] doctrines that are consonant with those of the Stoics."

19. See Inwood 2014a.

20. Striker 1986.

21. Striker 1986: 189–90. See also Klein, this volume.

22. Striker 1986: 188.

23. Cicero emphasizes that Hecaton dedicated his book on *kathêkonta* to Quintus Tubero, but that does not mean that Hecaton ever visited Italy—Greek intellectuals had many opportunities to network with wealthy Romans on their home turf. Panaetius also dedicated a book to Tubero, his *On Grief* (*De Finibus* 4.23). Panaetius did spend time in Rome, of course, but it does not in the least follow that Hecaton did.

24. In Athens, surely. Plutarch (*Tib.Gr.* 8.6) merely says "in the city" (*en astei*), but there is no record of Antipater being in Rome and he was the head of the school in Athens.

25. Ducos 1994: 116–7 flatly asserts the consensus, that Blossius was a Stoic and that his influence on the political programs of Tiberius Gracchus and Aristonicus (in Asia Minor) was of a clearly Stoic character. The evidence falls far short of supporting these claims.

26. At *Acad.* 2.69 Cicero says that Dardanus and Mnesarchus were the leading Stoics in Athens when Antiochus of Ascalon was forming his distinctive views. On Apollodorus I follow Guérard 1989: 221. He also adds a mathematician, Dionysius of Cyrene.

27. There is, however, no reason to claim that the influence of the "Scipionic circle" exerted "a deep influence on Panaetius' later thinking" as does Roskam 2005: 34. For a similar view, see Vimercati 2002: 24. Strasburger 1966 demonstrates that there was no such "circle." Alesse 1997: 167–70 surveys earlier scholarship.

28. See Alesse 2012: 132–5; Haake 2007: 198–205.

29. Haake 2007: 200–1.

30. *Index Stoicorum* col. lxiii lines 2–3.

31. Contra Alesse 1997: 150.

32. The dates have been contested. I follow Ferrary 2007: 21 and Haake 2007: 202.

33. Sedley 2003: 26–28.

34. Gourinat 2012.

35. Asclepius *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* p. 90 Hayduck.

p. 526 36. The evidence is in Cicero, at *De Officiis* 1.101, 132; 2.18. It is controversial how much of the *De Officiis* should be attributed to Panaetius and also how to interpret Cicero's wording here. I find tempting the view taken in Tieleman 2003: 245–50 that Cicero's *De Officiis* is insufficient evidence for this sort of dualism in Panaetius. Contra: Alesse 1997: 256–7.

37. See Inwood 2014b and texts cited there. Tieleman 2007 is properly critical of the way most earlier scholarship has used the evidence from Cicero's *De Officiis* on this issue; he is more cautious in the conclusions drawn from the evidence in Nemesius than is Inwood 2014b.

38. Philo *On the eternity of the world* 76 connects his denial of conflagration with a belief in the distinctively Aristotelian doctrine that the cosmos is eternal.

39. Cicero says that much of what he wrote in Books 1 and 2 of the *De Officiis* was inspired by Panaetius's book *Peri Kathêkontôn*, but there is a great deal of disagreement about how much of the doctrine purveyed there came more or less directly from Panaetius and how much should be attributed to Cicero himself. My own view is that we should be cautious about attributing particular details to Panaetius, but a more ambitious attribution to Panaetius is urged by Peter Brunt 2013: chapter 5; a more cautious view is taken by Tieleman 2007.

40. These aspects of *oikeiôsis* were no doubt the *aphormai* referred to in his formulation of the *telos*: "living according to the starting points given to us by nature" (Clement *Strom*. 2.21.129). See Roskam 2005: 41.

41. See Gill 1988.

42. Probably in Greek; see Athenaeus 168de Kaibel.

43. As suggested by Goulet 2000: 526.

44. Throughout the report on Stoic ethics in Diogenes Laertius he is routinely cited alongside Chrysippus or other conventional Stoic thinkers for holding traditional doctrines; even when he is paired with Posidonius alone, as at 7.124, it is for an uncontroversial point: that the wise man will pray for good things from the gods.

45. Cicero *Off.* 3.63, 3.89; Seneca 2.18, 3.18.

46. For his study with Panaetius, see: Suda s.v. Posidonius. For his death, we rely on the implication of Cicero's remarks at *Tusculan Disputations* 5.107 that he was dead by 45 BCE. He went on an embassy in 51 BCE. Lucian *Longaevi* 20 says he lived to the age of 84.

47. *Tusculan Disputations* 2.61.

48. Posidonius wrote a lengthy history, picking up after Polybius (see Suda s.v. Polybius) and continuing to his own times. He included an account of Pompey (Strabo 11.1.6) but turned down Cicero's request. Evidently his history focused on the more powerful and successful political and military leaders.

49. The Suda s.v. *Iasôn*, reports that Posidonius's daughter married a man from Nysa named Menecrates; Jason was their son and he settled in his mother's city of Rhodes to take over his grandfather's school.

50. The recent overview of Posidionius's career by Keimpe Algra 2012, on which I draw, is excellent and strikes a good balance when dealing with the many controversies still current.

51. Salles, this volume.

52. See Inwood 1991, though the nature of Stoic spatial concepts is still controversial; see recently Powers 2014.

53. What observation would enable him to calculate the volume increase consequent on the ignition of all the matter in the cosmos? Nothing empirically accessible, certainly. See for example Pliny *Natural History* 2.85 (F 120 E–K) and Cleomedes
p. 527 *On the Heavens* 1.7.1–50 ↳ Todd (F 202 E–K) and 2.1.269–85 Todd (F 115 E–K) for the careful methodology he used in calculating other sizes and distances.

54. Commentary on *Physics* 2.2, 193b23 (p. 292 Diels).

55. See Kidd 1978.

56. Diogenes Laertius 7.39–41; Sextus *M* 7.19.

57. Algra 2012: 1495–7.

58. In particular Tieleman 2003 and Cooper 1998.

59. Posidonius's focus on the passive aspects of the soul will also have had an impact on theories about how to prevent and cure the passions, but I do not think that we need this insight to account for the alleged problem posed by the "triple

oikeiôsis" (see Galen *On the Doctrines of Plato and Hippocrates* 5.5.8–9); Galen is, as usual, trying to make Posidonius appear to be in serious disagreement with Chrysippus on moral psychology. See Cooper 1998.

60. Inwood 2014b.

61. Panaetius was perhaps inspired by his predecessors to make some of these radical changes. Philo *On the Eternity of the World* 77–78 says that Diogenes late in life came to suspend judgment about conflagration and that Panaetius's older contemporary Boethus of Sidon (died c. 145 BCE) abandoned it. But we hear of no post-Panaetian Stoics who took this view.

62. See esp. Tieleman 2003: 225–6.

63. See Cicero's remarks at *Tusc. Disp.* 4.7. I have learned a great deal about the prevalence of Epicureanism among the Roman elite from the work of Gilbert 2015: chapter 1 and chapter 2 (unpublished doctoral dissertation). See Fish and Sanders, this volume.

64. On Cicero as a philosopher, see inter alia Powell 1995, several chapters in Steel 2013, Brittain 2006 (especially about Cicero's skepticism), and Schofield 2008 (on Cicero as a writer of dialogues).

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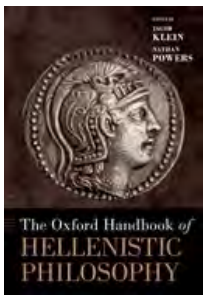
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PART IV

THE SKEPTICAL ACADEMY



The Oxford Handbook of Hellenistic Philosophy

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CHAPTER

23 Arcesilaus and the Academy's Skeptical Turn

James Allen

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the philosophical activity of Arcesilaus of Pitane, Plato's fifth successor as head of the Academy, who was responsible for the change in the school's direction that led our ancient authorities to distinguish a New Academy of Arcesilaus and his successors. Until its dissolution in the first century BCE, the New Academy was *skeptical*, devoting the bulk of its energy to challenging the possibility of knowledge. Arcesilaus defended two views we have come to associate with skepticism: (1) inapprehensibility (*akatalêpsia*), roughly speaking that knowledge is impossible, and (2) a consequent obligation to global suspension of judgment (*epochê*). This chapter argues that these views are best regarded not as doctrines to which Arcesilaus himself was committed, but rather as positions he defended dialectically, intended to present a challenge to the Academy's Stoic opponents from whose philosophy Arcesilaus drew much of the material on which his arguments were based. Nonetheless, Arcesilaus's own noncommittal stance did not prevent these views from being adopted by later Academics who were indeed committed skeptics.

Keywords: Arcesilaus, Academy, skepticism, knowledge, dialectical argument

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1. Arcesilaus's Life

Arcesilaus was born in Pitane, a Greek-speaking city on the west coast of Asia Minor, in 315/4 BCE. He showed great promise in his youth, and a family dispute about his future was eventually resolved in favor of philosophy against the wishes of his guardian, who would have preferred that he study rhetoric. In Pitane and after reaching Athens, he studied several subjects under a number of masters including Aristotle's successor, Theophrastus, before finding a permanent philosophical home in the Academy. He became the school's scholarch in 270/69 BCE and died aged 75 in 241/40 BCE.[1]

Like Socrates before him and Carneades afterward, Arcesilaus wrote no philosophical works. As a result, the ancient authors who are our sources interpreted him in the light of their own views and agendas; thus, the accounts of his philosophical activity that have come down to us are not always consistent with each other.[2]

2. Skepticism in the Academy

Depending on the observer's point of view, to Arcesilaus is due the credit or the blame for what came to be seen as the Academy's "skeptical turn," a change in direction that his successors in the Academy pursued, sometimes in different and competing ways, until the school's dissolution in the first century BCE. At that point, Aenesidemus—a former Academic disillusioned with the direction taken by the school in his day—founded the Pyrrhonian school, named after Pyrrho of Elis, an older contemporary of Arcesilaus's, whom the neo-Pyrrhonists chose as their figurehead (cf. Sextus Empiricus *PH* I 3).[3] Though Aenesidemus opened his
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school to other influences, he and his followers owed ↳ enough of a debt to the Academics for observers (then and later) to perceive an affinity between them.[4] The appellation "skeptic" was first applied by the Pyrrhonists to themselves, and only much later, after the Academy had ceased to exist, to the Academics.

It is hard to deny that Arcesilaus opened a new chapter in the history of the Academy, and perhaps Greek philosophy more generally. Modern scholars who speak of a new direction or even a revolution in the Academy echo ancient authorities who regarded the change as a radical break or rupture in the school's history.[5] This was, for example, the opinion of Antiochus, who was a member of the skeptical Academy himself before breaking away to found a school that he represented as a return to the philosophy of the original Academy of Plato and his successors before Arcesilaus. The character Varro, who speaks for Antiochus in the second edition of Cicero's *Academica*, refers to Arcesilaus's desertion (*defectio*, *discidium)*, for which he demands an explanation from Cicero, who was himself an adherent of the skeptical Academy (*Varro* 43; cf. *Luc*. 14–15).[6] A similar charge, though from the perspective of a different conception of Platonism, was made by Numenius (second century CE), who wrote a book *About the Discord between the Academics and Plato* (fr. 24 Des Places = Eusebius *Praep. Ev*. XIV, 4, 16 ff.).[7] And this way of viewing the matter is behind the distinction that ancient historiographers of philosophy drew between the "New Academy" of Arcesilaus and his successors and the "Old Academy" of his predecessors, from Plato to Crates (to mark his supposed return to which Antiochus also dubbed his own school the "Old Academy"). The classification sometimes took the form of a more elaborate division, crediting Arcesilaus with founding the Middle Academy, while crediting Carneades—the greatest of his successors and the philosopher whose influence dominated the school for the rest of its history—with founding the New Academy, and leaving room for a fourth and fifth Academy of Philo of Larissa and Antiochus respectively (Sextus Empiricus *PH* I 220; DL I 19).[8]

The nature and extent—and even the reality—of Arcesilaus's "turn" were a matter of controversy from the outset, however. Arcesilaus himself was at pains to deny he was breaking new ground. This is clear from a passage (also of interest for other reasons as we shall see) that defends Arcesilaus from the charge—leveled against him by his Epicurean contemporary Colotes—that he recycled old ideas as if they were his own in order to gain a reputation for innovation:

> **T1** So far was Arcesilaus from cherishing a reputation for innovation or claiming ancient ideas as his own that the sophists of his day accused him of foisting the *dogmas* of *inapprehensibility* (*akatalêpsia*) and *suspension* (*epochê*) on Socrates, Plato, Parmenides and Heraclitus … as it were certifying his own views by associating them with distinguished antecedents.[9]
>
> (Plutarch *Contra Colotem* 1121F–1122A = LS 68H [trans. Einarson and De Lacy])

And later New Academics followed Arcesilaus's lead. Cicero has his own character in the *Varro* say, "the Academy they call New seems Old to me," in support of which he defends a "skeptical" interpretation of Plato (46).

3. The Meaning of Skepticism

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The term "skepticism" is unavoidable: but what is skepticism? The Greek verb *skeptomai* means to "examine," "consider," or "inquire," and the noun *skepsis* means "examination" or "inquiry." Their etymology leads back to a root related to seeing or vision. Sextus sometimes uses the term "skeptic" in the sense of "open-minded inquirer," a status which he maintains belongs exclusively to the Pyrrhonists—though there are notorious difficulties understanding Pyrrhonism's commitment to inquiry—and which he strives unconvincingly to deny to the Academics (Sextus Empiricus *PH* I 1–4).[10] But it is not open-minded inquiry that we typically have in mind when we speak of "skeptical" "arguments," "positions," "attitudes" or the "skeptics" who made, defended, or evinced them. Nor was this the shared characteristic that united Academics and Pyrrhonians in the view of the ancients.

A clue is furnished by the reference in Plutarch (**T1**) to Arcesilaus's *doctrines* or *dogmas*, inapprehensibility (*akatalêpsia*) and suspension of judgment (*epochê*). In characterizing skepticism, it is the dominant role played by arguments to the effect that nothing can be known and the accompanying demand that one should forswear belief or suspend judgment in consequence on which ancient and modern observers have fastened. To judge by Plutarch's remarks, skepticism would be a system or position at whose center there are the "two dogmas of skepticism," and a skeptic would be someone who adhered to them—and it was treated as such by opponents like Antiochus (Cicero *Luc*. 29)

The sheer strangeness of the "skeptical system" so conceived should give us pause, however. Consider the matter from the doxographical perspective: Philosophers of different schools have entertained an extraordinary range of opinions—their doctrines, *dogmata*, or *placita*—about a list of questions (e.g., whether the world is eternal; of how many elements it is made and what they are; what the end of goods or the criterion of truth is; and so on). Roughly speaking, an actual philosophical position arises when belief or conviction is joined to a system of doctrines (supported by arguments, explanations, and the like). And the belief or conviction of the philosophers who hold the position is typically thought to entail the further belief on their part that they know, or are on the way to knowing, the *doctrines* at issue. Their doctrines are at least what they expect to know when the goal of knowing how things are is achieved (cf. Cicero *Luc*. 115).

Yet, though it seems that they could be vehemently attacked or ardently defended, it is hard to see how the Academics' skeptical doctrines could be held or adopted. The doctrine of inapprehensibility could be true, in which case it would not be false; or false, in which case it would not be true. Paradox arises, however, when we try to combine it with assent or endorsement so as to produce a skeptical *position*. If it were true that nothing can be known, it would be impossible to know that it was, and it would seem that no one who understood what it meant could affirm it with any confidence, even if only in the hope or expectation that it would be known one day or by someone. And if that were not ↳ enough, the doctrine prohibiting mere opinion and prescribing suspension of judgment or *epochê* would forbid the adoption of the doctrine of inapprehensibility—or of itself, for that matter—since the best either could hope to be is a true opinion. Unsurprisingly, there was an ancient

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tradition of attributing to the Academics the paradoxical claim to know that nothing can be known (Lactantius *Div. Inst*. III 6, 10–12 = Mette T 14b = Vezzoli F 128; cf. Cicero *Fin*. V 76). Seneca maintains that the Academics introduce a new science of not knowing (*nova scientia*, *nihil scire*) (*Ep*. 88, 44).[11] And it is fair to wonder (as many observers have) whether, despite the existence of a notional skeptical position, being a skeptic was a real psychological possibility.

4. The Dialectical Interpretation

The paradox of skepticism—namely that it undermines itself and forbids its own adoption, in a word, that it is *untenable*—furnishes a powerful motive, together with other grounds, for favoring a *dialectical* interpretation of the New Academy in general, and of Arcesilaus in particular. The problem of how Arcesilaus could hold a skeptical position by adhering to the skeptical doctrines for which he argued so vigorously dissolves if he did not endorse them in propria persona, but merely argued for them *dialectically*.[12]

By "dialectical" argument we mean, first, arguments of the kind employed by Socrates as depicted by Plato, a method for the invention and evaluation of which was formulated by Aristotle in the *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*; second, arguments that share relevant features with that central case. Paradigmatically dialectical arguments are conducted face to face between two parties. One of these, the answerer, defends a thesis. The other party, the questioner, puts questions to the answerer from whose answers to which—answers now become premises—he aims to construct an argument whose conclusion contradicts the answerer's thesis. For our present purpose, the key feature that transfers from the central case is *detachment*. The thesis defended by the answerer need not be one to which he is committed, and he regulates his answers by consulting not his own convictions, but his sense of what is reputable; the questioner likewise chooses his questions with an eye on the same considerations, putting aside his own convictions. In Aristotle's account, detachment is usually required of both parties in this exchange. Dialectical discussion is valuable, among other ways, as a means of *skepsis*, inquiry (Aristotle *Top*. VIII.5, 159a28, 33).

Proponents of a dialectical interpretation of the skeptical Academy typically have in mind a form of dialectical practice like the one that Aristotle calls *peirastic*— meaning "that puts to the test"—which most closely resembles Socratic argument. In it the answerer defends a view of his own and answers in conformity with his own convictions, while the questioner, maintaining detachment, argues ad hominem (Aristotle *SE* 2, 165b4; 8, 169b25; 11, 171b4, 172a21–7; 183b1). The *demonstrandum* is determined by the answerer's thesis, which it
p. 537 contradicts, and the premises, put in the form of questions, are ↳ chosen because they are convictions held by the answerer or will be otherwise hard for him to reject. The resulting paradoxes and difficulties are, so to speak, "on the answerer."

Even the later New Academics who were most firmly attached to Arcesilaus's skeptical dogmas applied dialectical strategies of interpretation when faced with Carneades's arguments for inconsistent alternative theses—e.g., that the wise person will assent, so forming opinions, or suspend judgment, so avoiding them:

> **T2** For my part, believing Clitomachus rather than Philo or Metrodorus, I deem this [namely the proposition that the wise person will form opinions even though nothing is apprehended] to have been one that [Carneades] argued for rather than endorsed.[13]
>
> (Cicero *Luc*. 78 = LS 69 H)

And even the case for *akatalêpsia*, though a central part of the Academy's argumentative stock in trade, was not exempt from dialectical interpretation. According to the position adopted by Philo of Larissa late in his career, the Academy had never held that everything is inapprehensible, but had only ever meant to argue that this

conclusion follows granted the *Stoic* conception of apprehension, which should therefore be rejected (Cicero *Luc*. 18; Sextus Empiricus *PH* I 235 = LS 68T, 68U).

On almost any view of Arcesilaus and the New Academy, then, local applications of dialectical strategies of interpretation are in order. But we may also speak of a "global" dialectical interpretation that refuses to isolate assertions, arguments or views that belong to Arcesilaus or other Academics in propria persona from those that are put forward or defended ad hominem. By itself, the fact that such a global dialectical reading of Arcesilaus promises to rescue us from an interpretative difficulty is not enough to recommend it, but two further considerations favor it.

First, there is abundant evidence that Arcesilaus presented himself as, and was taken to be, a practitioner of dialectic in the tradition of Socrates and Aristotle. As Aristotle emphasizes, dialectical ability is a faculty for arguing on both sides of the question (Aristotle *Rhet*. I 1355a33–6). It is at its most conspicuous when actually exercised on both sides of a single issue by the same practitioner, a practice which Aristotle recommended as a form of training and at which Carneades excelled. But the same faculty can be exercised on one side only: when the agenda is set by one's interlocutor, and a different or opposing choice of thesis by the same or another interlocutor would have elicited an equally skillful argument to a different or opposite conclusion, based in the same way on concessions by the interlocutor. This was Arcesilaus's preferred form of argument (Cicero *De or.* III 67, *DND* I 11, *Fin*. II 2; Philodemus *Index Ac*. XIX 35 ff.).[14] He did not set out his own views on a topic, if any, but encouraged his interlocutors to present their (the interlocutors') own views, against which he would then argue, after the manner of Socrates.[15]

Second, the reported details of Arcesilaus's arguments suggest (though more strongly in some cases than in
p. 538 others and not without controversy) that they were fashioned with ↳ a paradigmatically dialectical end in view—namely, to exhibit the consequences that follow from the commitments of other philosophers, above all the Stoics.

5. The Case for Inapprehensibility (*Akatalêpsia*)

Though the main arguments of the Academy likely owed much to Arcesilaus's pioneering work, the form in which they are presented to us by Cicero (our main source) is no doubt due largely to Carneades and his successors. We are, then, indebted to Sextus Empiricus for providing separate summaries of Arcesilaus's and Carneades's arguments as part of an extended survey of views about the criterion of truth in *Adversus mathematicos* (*M*) VII. Because Arcesilaus wrote nothing, what has come down to us is to some (likely substantial) extent "mediated"; still, this passage offers us our best opportunity to identify a distinct "Arcesilean" strand of argument within the Academy.

According to the perspective from which our passage views the Academics, it is incumbent on a philosopher to set out a criterion by which human beings are to regulate their conduct (*M* VII 158, 166). Because arguments against the existence of the criterion bulk so large in the New Academics' philosophical activity, however, Sextus and his sources set Arcesilaus's positive account of the criterion—if that is what it is—against the backdrop of his skeptical arguments (Sextus Empiricus *M* VII 150–58 = **T3–T6** = LS 41C, 69B).

> **T3** (150) Arcesilaus and his followers did not in the first place define a criterion, and those who seem to have defined one specified this in opposition to the Stoics.[16] (151) For they [i.e. the Stoics] say that three things are yoked together with each other: knowledge, opinion and (in between them) apprehension. Of these they say knowledge is apprehension that is secure and firm and unshakeable by argument, while opinion is assent that is weak or false and apprehension, which is between these, (152) is assent to a cognitive impression. According to them, an impression that is true and such that it

> could not be false is cognitive. Of these they say that knowledge is found among the wise only, opinion only in fools, while apprehension is shared by both, (153) and this is the criterion of truth.
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *M* VII 150–3)

By emphasizing the polemical anti-Stoic character of Arcesilaus's arguments and insistently reminding us of the Stoic provenance of key ideas and premises, **T3** and the passage as a whole invites a dialectical reading, and it is one of the chief supports on which proponents of this interpretation rest their case.

What is more, Sextus's first sentence appears to recommend a dialectical reading not only of the first round of skeptical arguments, to the effect that there is no criterion and that the wise person will suspend judgment, but
p. 539 also of the last round, wherein ↳ Arcesilaus replies to the *apraxia* or *inactivity* argument, which though not explicitly named here is plainly in the background, by proposing a criterion. Arguments of this type, about which I shall have more to say later, were used repeatedly by opponents of both the Academics and the Pyrrhonists and are to the effect that skeptical arguments threaten to make action impossible, either in theory or, if they succeeded in convincing anyone, in practice.[17] On the face of it, the criterion that followers of Arcesilaus only seem to have defined (**T3** 150), but actually put forward in opposition to the Stoics, is the criterion defended at the end of the passage (**T6** 158).[18]

The main line of argument advances through a series of implicit concessions; each succeeding argument gains traction only if the problem raised by its predecessor is put aside:

> **T4** (*continuation of* ***T3***) These things being what the Stoics say, Arcesilaus opposed them, showing that apprehension is not a criterion between knowledge and opinion. For what they style apprehension or assent to a cognitive impression arises either in a wise person or in a fool. But if it occurs in a wise person, it is knowledge, and if in a fool, opinion, and (154) there is nothing apart from these or only a change of name. And if apprehension really is assent to a cognitive impression, then it is nonexistent, first because assent does not occur in relation to an impression, but in relation to a *logos* (because assents are to propositions), second because no impression is found such that it could not be false, (155) as is established through numerous and varied considerations. And as the cognitive impression does not exist, there will also be no apprehension. For this was assent to a cognitive impression. And as the apprehension does not exist, everything will be inapprehensible.
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *M* VII 153–5)

The first set of arguments in **T4** 153–154 do not much resemble skeptical arguments as they are usually understood. Though there may be more to them than at first appears, they have a pedantic air about them and seem to find fault with the Stoics' *formulation* of their own position more than anything else.

Knowledge (*epistêmê*), in one crucial sense, is defined by the Stoics as an assent meeting certain conditions to an impression (*phantasia*) that must likewise satisfy conditions of its own (**T3** 151–152). The impression must be true and cognitive (*katalêptikê*); the assent, which qualifies as an apprehension (*katalêpsis*) if given to such an impression, must be firm and unmovable by argument.[19] If any of these conditions is not satisfied, the assent is a mere opinion, or so Arcesilaus maintains, presumably on the basis of Stoic authority—especially, it is implied, Stoic views linking opinion and folly (i.e., the condition in which all human beings apart from the wise live) (**T3** 152). This would make opinion coextensive with what the Stoics, beginning with Zeno, called ignorance (Cicero *Varro* 41 = LS 41B).

In fact, the requirement that the impression to which assent is given be cognitive received the lion's share of attention from both the Stoa and the Academy. The most prominent ground for classifying an assent as an
p. 540 opinion is being given to a non-cognitive ↳ impression; in many argumentative contexts, opinion is opposed to apprehension in such a way as to suggest that it is not simply by, but also *only* by, assenting to a non-

cognitive impression that one forms an opinion (cf. Plutarch *St. Rep*. 1056F = LS 41E). If opinion is also opposed to knowledge so as to include all apprehension that does not qualify as knowledge, there is an inconsistency. It may be that such unclarities in the Stoic formulations or inconsistencies between contexts are the target of Arcesilaus's complaint. If apprehension is opposed to opinion, then *mere* apprehension (i.e., apprehension that is not knowledge) could more easily be viewed as lying between knowledge and opinion even though knowledge is a form of apprehension. On the other hand, if being an apprehension does not exclude being an opinion, it might be harder to regard it as being between knowledge and opinion.[20] But one wonders how much of the objection would be left if the Stoics had employed a different metaphor—e.g., that apprehension "straddles" knowledge and opinion.[21]

Next comes the argument that apprehension, defined as assent to a cognitive impression, cannot exist since assent relates not to an impression, but to a *logos*, as assents are to propositions. At first glance the point seems dull and scholastic. We know that the Stoics recognized a class of rational impressions, to which cognitive impressions belong, distinguished, as we like to put it, by the fact that they have propositional content (DL VII 51 = LS 39A). But there may be more to the argument than this, and in fact the Stoic account of rational impressions could have developed in response to Arcesilaus's objections.

To assent is to take for true. What one takes as true (or false) is a proposition. To be sure, to take a proposition for true one must think it—i.e., have an impression whose content it is. This is something anyone with the appropriate stock of concepts and rightly related to the world should be able to do. Sometimes and for some purposes it may not matter whether we speak of assenting to the proposition or the impression. If we turn away from the sensory realm (to which paradigmatic cognitive impressions belong), the question of why one assents will often be received as a request for grounds or reasons—i.e., for other propositions taken for true that lend support to the one at issue. But though these cognitive impressions may furnish reasons, they or their propositional contents are not inferred from reasons when functioning as the criterion. This is not because those contents, like logical truths, in principle require no such support. There is nothing about, for example, "This is Pollux" that commands assent by itself. Rather it must be something about the way in which our perceptual faculties are activated and something about the impression we have as a result that moves us, not the propositional content it may share with impressions that we infer or accept on testimony or suspend judgment about or reject as false.

Yet it would seem that we share these sensory faculties with non-rational animals and possess them before we are fully rational ourselves. At least since Plato's *Theaetetus*, philosophers have been aware of the difference, and the possibility of a gap, between the realm of reason, where truth and falsity, consistency and consequence,
p. 541 find an ↳ application, on the one hand, and the realm of passive sensory affections, on the other. It is an attractive speculation that concerns of this kind, rooted in reflections about Plato's *Theaetetus*, with which Arcesilaus must have been intimately familiar, are behind this argument, so briefly and dryly summarized in Sextus.[22]

Nonetheless, these difficulties are set aside so that Arcesilaus can make the next and final anti-criterial argument. He now argues that there are no cognitive impressions and hence no apprehensions, with the result that everything is inapprehensible—the first of the skeptical doctrines. Together with the "numerous and varied considerations" by which it is supported, this argument does conform to our expectations, and it became the centerpiece of the Academy's skeptical polemic against Stoic epistemology (see the fuller reports in Cicero *Luc*. 40–1, 83–90; Sextus Empiricus *M* VII 402–11 = LS 70B, LS 40H, LS 40J).

To be cognitive, impressions must be such that they could not be false. An impression, which is as it happens true, *could* be false in the relevant way, false for all we know or can tell, if one could have a different impression just like it—indistinguishable from it in every relevant respect—in circumstances in which that other impression was, as it happens, false. To be such that it *cannot* be false, this scenario must be impossible; the impression must arise in a way that guarantees its truth and imparts to it a character that belongs to

impressions so formed and only to them, and which moreover is such that we can discriminate in its favor. Zeno may have been compelled to clarify this very point by Arcesilaus's criticisms (Cicero *Luc*. 77 = LS 40D).

The Academic argument proceeds by trying to show that for any true impression formed by the truth-guaranteeing processes specified by the Stoics, there could be a false impression that is indistinguishable from it—i.e., that any impression that is as it happens true could for all we know be false. In particular, they strove to show that anything alleged to function as the required character by belonging to all and only impressions so formed can also be found in false impressions. These false impressions may, for example, be no less clear, compelling, precise, and so on than true impressions.

The "numerous and varied" supporting considerations to which Sextus refers will likely have included arguments already familiar to Plato and Aristotle and which have been skeptics' stock in trade ever since: optical illusions, dreams, acts of divine or demonic deception, abnormal mental states, and the like (Cicero *Luc*. 88–90; Sextus Empiricus *M* VII 403–8 = LS 40H). Arcesilaus may also have used the arguments based on the existence of twins and other qualitatively indistinguishable objects that are more familiar to us in their (later) Carneadean version (cf. *M* VII 402 ff.; cf. Cicero *Luc*. 84–5).[23] In this sort of case, the problem is that even confining one's assent to perfectly accurate impressions formed in conditions as ideal as any Stoic could ask would still not make the wise person immune to error. For one might mistake one object for another indistinguishable from it because a perfectly accurate impression of the one would be indistinguishable from a perfectly accurate impression of the other.[24]

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6. The case for Suspension of Judgment (*Epochê*)

The case for the first skeptical dogma, *inapprehensibility*, made, Arcesilaus turns to the second, *suspension*:

> **T5** (*continuation of* ***T4***) But since everything is inapprehensible, it will follow also [or "even": *kai*] according to the Stoics (156) that the wise person suspends judgment. Let us consider it in this way: since everything is inapprehensible through the nonexistence of the Stoic criterion, should the wise person assent, he will assent to the inapprehensible, but assent to the inapprehensible is opinion. (157) The result is that if the wise person is one of those who assent, the wise person will be one of those who opine. But the wise person is not one of those who opine (for this is the part of folly according to them and is the cause of sins). Therefore the wise person is not one of those who assent. But if this, it will be necessary for him to refrain from assent about everything. But refraining from assent is nothing other than suspending judgment. (158) The wise person will, therefore, suspend judgment about everything.
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *M* VII 155–8)

Suspension of judgment is not required by *inapprehensibility* alone. Indeed, to judge by Cicero's testimony, later New Academics like Metrodorus and Philo, claiming to follow the authority of Carneades, endorsed the latter, but rejected the former, maintaining that assent in the absence of cognitive impressions and the opinions to which it gives rise are compatible with wisdom (Cicero *Luc*. 78, cf. 59, 67, 148).[25] A second premise is required, which is supplied by the Stoic doctrine proscribing opinion for the wise and by the Stoic conception of opinion, which, whatever else may be true of it, takes assent to a cognitive impression to be at least a necessary condition if opinion is to be avoided. In the absence of cognitive impressions, suspension of judgment is the only way to avoid opinion. The wise will therefore suspend judgment about everything.

But though Sextus says the conclusion that the wise person is obliged to suspend judgment "will follow according to the Stoics" (**T5**, 155–6; cf. 157), he does so in a sentence which can be translated as, "And since everything is inapprehensible, it will follow *also* according to the Stoics that the wise person suspends

judgment" (155–6). Greek *kai* can have this force ("also"), though it could alternatively mean "even" or "actually."[26] Scholars who resist an exclusively dialectical interpretation have naturally favored "also"—so that Arcesilaus will have meant "the Stoics will be obliged to do as we do."[27]

Sextus now turns to Arcesilaus's criterion:

> **T6** (*continuation of* ***T5***) But since it was necessary also to inquire about the conduct of life, which is not of a nature to be accounted for apart from a criterion, on which happiness, i.e. the end of life,
> p. 543 depends for its assurance, Arcesilaus ↳ says that he who suspends judgment [or, instead of "he … judgment," "not suspending judgment he"] will regulate his choices and generally his actions by the reasonable (*eulogon*), and proceeding in accordance with this criterion he will act rightly, as happiness arises through wisdom, and wisdom is found in right actions, and the right action is the very thing which, being done, has a rational defense. The person who adheres to the reasonable then will act rightly and be happy.
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *M* VII 158)

The stated reasons why Arcesilaus must specify a criterion incorporate two very substantial assumptions: that the conduct of life must be directed to the attainment of happiness (*eudaimonia*); and that life so directed is not possible without a criterion. These claims may not have belonged to the original context of argument (though neither would they have been out of place there). In any case, there is scope for a dialectical interpretation, according to which Arcesilaus was rebutting a Stoic argument to the effect that the Academy's skeptical case had to be unsound because the alternative is too awful to contemplate. To counter this, he would have striven to show his Stoic opponents, on the basis of resources furnished by their own system, that it is possible to lead a life, and do so wisely and well, even in the absence of cognitive impressions. The many indications in the earlier part of the passage (**T3–5**) that Arcesilaus's polemic is aimed at the Stoics, and the use in **T6** of ideas and terms dear to the Stoics (e.g., the "reasonable," the *katorthôma* or right action, and the view that the happy life is the life of wisdom) all help make this a plausible idea.

There are, however, a pair of interpretive puzzles.

(1) As part of the argument in defense of the criterion of the "reasonable" imputed to Arcesilaus, Sextus cites almost verbatim the Stoic definition of the *kathêkon*, the appropriate action, as that which being done has a reasonable (*eulogon*) defense; but apparently this is here offered as the definition of the *katorthôma*, or action rightly done, and not the *kathêkon* (cf. DL VII 107, 108; Cicero *Fin*. III 58). To be sure, every right action satisfies the requirements on appropriate actions, but it is a *perfect* appropriate action only if it fulfills additional conditions. Did Arcesilaus intend a jibe of some sort at the Stoics' expense? Perhaps. But if his argument was elided in the course of being transmitted, it might have begun life as something like the following. Happiness consists in right actions, which are appropriate actions performed by a wise and virtuous human being. The role of the criterion is to ascertain which actions are appropriate. Assuming that the other conditions are satisfied—say, the possession by the agent of a wise and virtuous character—these actions, when done, will be rightly done, ensuring happiness. But what does such an agent have to know about an action to know that it is appropriate? As the Stoics themselves maintain, that it has a reasonable justification. The reasonable would therefore seem to be suited to discharge the function of the criterion in a life of happiness by making the infallible performance of right actions possible.

(2) Such a life, Arcesilaus argues, is possible even while suspending judgment about everything—or so reads
p. 544 the text favored by most editors and translators, who accept a ↳ correction to the manuscript without which Arcesilaus would be telling us what one would do while *not* suspending judgment. The manuscript reading is favored by the work's most recent translator, however, who suspects this may be an aside by Sextus himself.[28] Behind the variation lies a substantive question of interpretation. It is possible to distinguish two parts to the *apraxia* argument.

The challenge presented by the first has to do with the basis for deliberation and choice:

> (a) What is to replace the cognitive impression as a guide to action?

The second concerns the moral-psychological mechanism for generating actions:

> (b) In the absence of assent, what will cause action to take place?

This second challenge is effective especially in the context of Stoic theory, which makes all action the result of assent to a certain kind of action-guiding impression.

In answer to (a), Carneades and his Academic successors put forward *probability* (Cicero's preferred translation of the Greek term *pithanon*, persuasive, is *probabile*, that which lends itself to approval). They divided over (b) (Cicero *Luc*. 78). Philo and Metrodorus—and if they were right to impute this view to him, Carneades himself—avoided the issue by relaxing the rule confining assent to cognitive impressions: the wise person will assent to probable impressions, so forming opinions, albeit well-judged, carefully considered opinions, endorsed with the proviso that one might be wrong. Opinions prescribing action will, provided there is no impediment, give rise to it. Clitomachus, followed by Cicero—and if they were right in imputing the view to him, Carneades himself—answer (a) in the same way, by an appeal to *probability*, but because they reject opinion and the assent in which it has its origin, they must confront (b) without appealing to assent. They do this by distinguishing ways of approving impressions, only one of which, *assent*, gives rise to opinion; approving impressions in the other way, without *assent*, the wise person is able to deliberate, choose and act (cf. Cicero *Luc*. 104 and 99–100 = LS 69I, 42I).[29]

Reasonableness, to which Arcesilaus appeals, plays a part like that played by *probability*. If the manuscript reading is correct (and accurately reflects Arcesilaus's argument) Arcesilaus would have anticipated the mitigated skeptical position defended by Cicero's character Catulus in the *Lucullus* and likely advocated in the Academy by Philo of Larissa, though this is disputed (Cicero *Luc.* 148; cf. 59, 67, 78, 112).[30] But the thrust of the passage creates the expectation that we are going to hear about how to live *without* assent. Testimonies from elsewhere, especially Cicero, suggest that Arcesilaus consistently "adhered" to suspension, a point on which Carneades by contrast appeared to wobble (Cicero *Luc*. 59, 67). Arcesilaus therefore likely faced a version of the second part of the *apraxia* argument, (b); but it is hard to see how he responded, unless Plutarch's *Contra Colotem* 1122B–D (= LS 69A) holds the answer. Here we find an Academic reply to a Stoic formulation of (b),
p. 545 although it is unclear exactly what part of the long-running ↳ Stoic-Academic debate is being represented (and who the parties to it are). Still, it is a plausible hypothesis that Plutarch is re-purposing Arcesilaus's response to the Stoics to answer the Epicurean Colotes.[31]

7. Skeptical Action

As has often been observed, Arcesilaus's response is heavily indebted to the Stoics. There are, he says, three motions in the soul (*Contra Colotem* 1122B): the sensitive (*phantastikon*) (the adjective is formed from the word standardly translated as "impression"), the impulsive (*hormêtikon*) and that of assent (*sunkatathetikon*). The first two are ineliminable, but (according to Arcesilaus and contra the Stoics), they are all that is needed to act, even in the case of rational agents. The impression of something appropriate (*oikeion*) elicits an impulse toward it, which moves the agent to action. This is how the Stoics think non-human animals and immature humans behave (DL VII 86). But, the argument goes, there can be no error and no opinion without assent (cf. Cicero *Luc*. 38), which unlike the other motions, is under our voluntary control. If one is inalterably opposed to opinion, then, why not abolish assent since, contrary to the *apraxia* argument, our power to act remains unimpaired?

But it is not easy to see how Arcesilaus's "theory" could fill the lacuna in his response to the first part of the *apraxia* argument, (a), by explaining how, while suspending judgment, one is to use the criterion of the reasonable. Indeed, it seems to make it redundant by removing reason from the equation altogether. In the Stoic theory from which Arcesilaus takes so much, assent is part of the package that constitutes rationality.[32] Talk of *regulating* actions by the reasonable suggests the weighing and balancing of considerations of fact and value, the comparative assessment of alternative courses of action and the like, which, if all goes well, issue in a choice—i.e., it would seem, an act of assent or something that discharges the same function to an action-guiding impression (Sextus Empiricus *M* VII 158). Action on impulse triggered by an impression without the intervention of assent would seem to leave no room for any of this.

A dialectical or ad hominem reading of Arcesilaus's arguments, which would free us from the need to reconcile them with each other, is therefore attractive here. If Arcesilaus is raising difficulties for the Stoics, his arguments do not have to yield conclusions that are consistent with each other. Different arguments could have been adapted to different argumentative occasions. Or, one can speculate, they could have belonged to a sequence whose conclusions, like those of the anti-criterial arguments preserved in **T3**, do not cohere to form a position. In response to the charge that suspension of judgment makes action of even the most minimal kind impossible, Arcesilaus could have responded with the Stoicizing theory of action preserved by Plutarch. But that need not have been the end of the matter, for this move invites the response that action as conceived by Arcesilaus's "theory" cannot lead to happiness, which arises from wisdom and is constituted by rightly done
p. 546 actions (cf. **T6**), or objections of the kind we find in ↳ Cicero's *Lucullus*: without assent, what becomes of the voluntary, which is in our power, and without which it seems that virtue is impossible (38–9)? On this hypothesis, Sextus and Plutarch, each for purposes of his own related to the controversy in view, would have told only part of the story. It remains unclear, nonetheless, how the wise person was to use the criterion of the reasonable, with or without assent.

8. Arcesilaus's Motives

So far, I have concentrated on Arcesilaus's "skeptical system" and defended a dialectical interpretation of it. But to leave matters at this may be thought to be unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons, some general, some having to do with the specifics of Arcesilaus's case. Philosophical systems like Stoicism or Epicureanism contain in their accounts of human nature the motives for the philosophical activity of which they are the issue. A dialectical interpretation makes the contents of Arcesilaus's system unavailable for this purpose, leaving us none the wiser about why, for example, he and his successors chose to practice philosophy and to practice it as they did. Interpretations distinguishing between the face Arcesilaus showed the world and a hidden side—a secret doctrine, different from and unrelated to the position he upheld in public—were attractive to some ancient observers, among other reasons, because they promise to reveal something about his motives (Sextus Empiricus *PH* I 234; Augustine *Cont. Ac*. III 17.38; Augustine *Ep*. 1.1–2, *Ep*. 118.16; Eusebius *Praep. Ev*. XIV.VI.6 = Numenius fr. 25 Des Places).

To these general considerations suggesting that there must be more to the story, we may add three specific considerations based on our evidence about Arcesilaus:

(1) Testimonies about his motives laying stress on his commitment to open-minded inquiry in pursuit of the truth.

(2) The prominence of another kind of argument about which I have said little so far, but which our sources stress: creating oppositions among arguments. Being less closely tied than the argument for inapprehensibility to a specific theory of knowledge, this form of argument may suggest a more plausible motive for Arcesilaus's philosophical activity.

(3) The efforts that he made to place himself in the tradition of Academic and, more broadly, Greek philosophy.

Because the first two considerations are entangled with the third in our evidence, let us tackle them in connection with it. This will also give us a chance to come back to the question of Arcesilaus's originality.

The New Academy's accounts of Arcesilaus's relation to the past, and by implication their own, are however not of a piece. Indeed, the two skeptical histories of philosophy contained in Cicero's Academic books suggest
p. 547 different pictures of Arcesilaus's ↳ philosophical intentions.[33] According to the first, which responds to Varro's charge that the New Academy broke with the authentic Old Academic tradition (*Varro* 44–6), the New Academy's alleged break was nothing of the sort.[34] Rather the relation between Arcesilaus and his successors, on the one hand, and the ancient tradition of philosophy, on the other, was one of seamless continuity.

> **T7** It was not out of stubbornness or contentiousness, as we accept, that Arcesilaus began this whole struggle with Zeno, but because he was moved by the obscurity in things that had led Socrates to his confession of ignorance, and before Socrates, Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles and pretty much all the ancients, who *said* nothing can be cognized, nothing perceived, nothing known … *Accordingly* Arcesilaus *denied* that there was anything that could be known (*sciri*), not even this itself which Socrates had left for himself, viz. that he knew he knew nothing. He *thought* all things were so concealed and that there was nothing that could be discerned or understood. For which reasons [he thought] that no one should profess or affirm anything nor approve it with assent, but should hold back always and from every lapse to keep in check rashness, which is conspicuous when either something false or unperceived is approved, and [he thinks] that nothing is more base than for assent and approbation to outrun cognition and perception. He did what was consistent with this reasoning, so that by arguing against the views of all he led most people away from their own, since when equal weights of argument on opposing sides were discovered, assent was more readily suspended …
>
> (Cicero *Varro* 44–6, emphasis mine)

Although Zeno is presented as Arcesilaus's principal opponent, there is no hint that Arcesilaus learned anything from him. The Latin terms that Cicero uses to translate the distinctively Stoic notion of *apprehension* (*katalêpsis*)—a coinage of Zeno's (*Luc*. 145)—*cognoscere* and especially *percipere*, are here, but freely mixed with others, *scire*, *cernere*, *intellegere*. If the grounds of the skeptical conclusions owe something to Stoicism—a point emphasized by Sextus (**T3–T5** 151–7)—nothing is said about that here. And the practice of creating oppositions among arguments is presented not as a source of Arcesilaus's and his predecessors' skeptical insights, though this is not excluded, but as a means of spreading the gospel of suspended judgment, the necessity for which, it is implied, was established by other means. The aversion to rashness, precipitate judgment and mere opinion is treated as Arcesilaus's own, not an attitude he takes from or shares with the Stoics.

To judge by the depiction of him in **T7**, Arcesilaus was a *committed* skeptic, who subscribed to the two dogmas of skepticism, if not in precisely these terms, in propria persona.[35] If this picture is accurate, Arcesilaus was open to the charge, laid by unnamed sophists in (**T1**), that he attributes his own doctrines to his illustrious predecessors; and there is also justice in Lucullus's observation that he exaggerated the importance of occasional expressions of frustration by ancient philosophers who, if anything, were too prone to claim to know what they did not know (*Luc*. 14).

p. 548 (**T7**) has received low marks from contemporary scholars.[36] It would have Arcesilaus violates his own proscription of opinion, for in it he plainly affirms that nothing can be known and that nothing is worse than rashness. There is no trace of a subtle distinction between kinds of approval of the type we find in the *Lucullus*: "professing," "affirming," and "approving with assent" and "approbation," all of which give rise to opinion in the absence of knowledge, are treated as though of a piece. There is worse to come. The principle on the basis of

which Arcesilaus advocates suspension of judgment is that one ought to assent to (approve, affirm …) a proposition only if one knows it. But his ground for requiring total suspension of judgment is that nothing can be known, his willingness to affirm which ("he denied …" "he thought …") then seems to imply that he knew that nothing can be known (the very same Socratic claim that Arcesilaus is said to have denied).

The depictions of Arcesilaus and the New Academy in Cicero's *Lucullus* are different, however. For instance, in a departure from the surviving part of the *Varro*, argument on both sides of the question is presented first not as a means to drive home the lesson that nothing can be known, but as an instrument by which the Academics pursue truth or what is most like it (Cicero *Luc*. 7, 60; cf. Cicero *DND* I 11–12) and as a check to dogmatic rashness (Cicero *Luc*. 115, 124, 133). The difference is also evident in the second skeptical history at *Lucullus* 72–6 and the account of Arcesilaus that Cicero appends to it (see **T8**). It replies to Lucullus's criticism in *Lucullus* 14–15 of the skeptical history in the lost portion of the first edition corresponding to *Varro* 44–6 (**T7**), in which he likened the New Academics to political subversives trying to hide their treacherous designs behind the authority of illustrious figures from the Roman past. It includes figures unmentioned in the *Varro* (e.g., Xenophanes, Parmenides, Metrodorus of Chios, and the Cyrenaics), and it brings the story up to more recent times (beyond Arcesilaus's lifetime with a mention of Chrysippus). Although some of the figures Cicero mentions, including Plato and Socrates, are cited for their skeptical views, others are here because their dogmatic views present a challenge to conventional wisdom.[37] Anaxagoras is not the skeptic he was in the *Varro*, but holds that snow is black (72; cf. 100). Democritus's seemingly dogmatic statement that there is nothing true is explicitly contrasted with the Academics' view that nothing can be apprehended (73). The Cyrenaics are cited because they hold a view of about the scope of apprehension different from that of the Stoics, but no less dogmatic.

What we find, then, is less an assemblage of authorities united by a shared commitment to skeptical doctrine than a diverse collection of philosophers whose views—some of them skeptical, others not—serve as a salutary reminder of the difficulties on the way to knowledge and as a rebuke to the overconfident dogmatism of the New Academy's opponents. Though this is not said in so many words here, these views also provide material for the construction of opposing arguments (cf. Cicero *Luc*. 7, 115, 124, 133).

It is implied though not stated that Arcesilaus, to whom Cicero now turns, reacted to the views of the older philosophers about whom we have just heard. He plays a part that differs in several notable particulars from the one he was assigned in the *Varro*:

p. 549

> **T8** None of Zeno's predecessors had ever explicitly formulated, or even suggested, the view that a human being could hold no opinions—and not just that they could, but that doing so was necessary for the wise person. Arcesilaus thought that this view was both true and honourable, as well as right for the wise person …
>
> Arcesilaus agreed that [the third clause of the definition of the cognitive impression "such as could not come to be from what is not"] was a good addition to the definition, since neither a false impression, nor a true impression just like a false one, was cognitive. So then he set to work with his arguments, to show that there is no impression from something true such that there could not be one just like it from something false.
>
> (Cicero *Luc.* 77, trans. Brittain, modified)

As before, the controversy Arcesilaus initiated with Zeno requires explanation, and as before in **T7**, Cicero rejects the suggestion that he was moved by simple contentiousness. This time, however, Zeno is not simply the occasion for Arcesilaus to reaffirm a long-established skeptical orthodoxy. Instead, Arcesilaus's motive is desire to discover the truth (the motive of the New Academy as a whole according to *Luc*. 7, 60, 66). And he is taken by what Zeno has to say: his attitude to Zeno's idea of wisdom as a condition free from opinion mingles sympathy and interest, of the kind we would expect from a committed truth-seeker, with an acute awareness of the difficulties in its way, difficulties that he is duty-bound to bring to light and explore. What is more,

something new emerges from their encounter: the classical formulation of the skeptical position, whose form at least is indebted to Zeno.

To judge by the picture that we are invited to form here, Arcesilaus undertakes his dialectical examination of Zeno not as a faithful champion of the skeptical dogmas or for sport or exercise but for the sake of inquiry—*skepsis*. Though he endorses the ideal of wisdom free from opinion, his relation to the conclusions and the premises of his arguments may be one of detachment. To this way of seeing things, Stoic epistemology and the Academic arguments directed at it would, nonetheless, have held an especially strong attraction for Arcesilaus as exemplary specimens, in effect crystalizing the difficulties in the way of knowledge that had repeatedly emerged in the history of philosophy. On the one hand, there is a theory of knowledge worked out with great care and articulately defended by the leading philosophers of the day, who can fairly claim to have taken the ideal of wisdom as seriously as any philosophers ever have. On the other, there are the difficulties brought to light by Arcesilaus in the form of the arguments for inapprehensibility and suspension, difficulties that lend support to Arcesilaus's attitude of cautious hesitation and are a spur to further inquiry.

This is an attractive picture. Is it true to Arcesilaus? The state of the evidence does not allow us to say with any degree of certainty, it seems to be at least *an* Arcesilaus, a way of seeing him that enjoyed currency in the Academy, where it competed with others. And it would help us to see how Arcesilaus's philosophical activity prepared the way for developments that led eventually to the more committed forms of post-Carneadean skepticism.

p. 550 There is a gap between, on the one hand, the stance or attitude of the open-minded inquirer, the skeptic in the original sense of the term—perhaps one whom the practice of opposing arguments serves as a method of inquiry and a salutary warning against rashness and precipitate judgment—and on the other hand the skeptical *position* comprising the two skeptical dogmas and held, if it is held, on the strength of the arguments advanced in its support. The first depends only on the most general assumptions about rationality and knowledge—e.g., that pairs of inconsistent propositions cannot both be true, and that knowledge can only be of truths. The second appears, by contrast, to rely on substantive and potentially controversial details of an epistemological theory.

Yet it seems that the distance between them was not as great or as manifest as that between the skeptical position and the secret doctrines that some ancient observers attributed to Arcesilaus. And the later history of the Academy shows that the gap could be narrowed to some extent. The skeptical position and the powerful arguments assembled in support of it would seem to explain—to function almost as a diagnosis of—the difficulties and, paradoxically, to *justify* the dissatisfaction behind the skeptical attitude. On the account under consideration, by defending the skeptical position dialectically, Arcesilaus set in train the developments whose outcome is observable in Cicero's Academic books. By the time Carneades is through with the skeptical position or positions, there was an attractive explanation (indeed more than one), of what was apparently absent or incomplete in Arcesilaus: how a skeptical position, held in propria persona and not merely championed ad hominem, could provide a comfortable philosophical home, and how someone who adopted such a position could live and live well, and even how a philosopher who held the position could evince the skeptical attitude, in the original sense, by dedicating himself to the pursuit of truth. Carneades's explanations were attractive enough to win adherents, radical and mitigated Academic skeptics.

9. Conclusion

Was Arcesilaus an original thinker? The issue was of considerable interest to ancient observers. Colotes, taking his ideas to be old hat, accused him of pretending to an originality that was not his. Other contemporaries of Arcesilaus—the unnamed sophists—laid the opposite charge against him: that he falsely imputed original ideas of his own to his illustrious precursors (**T1**). Antiochus agreed with the latter. Cicero and Plutarch were more sympathetic to Arcesilaus's claim to distinguished antecedents.

None of these defenders or detractors of Arcesilaus considers a possibility suggested by an observation of his contemporary, Aristo of Chios, according to whom Arcesilaus was a chimera: Plato in front, Diodorus Cronus in the middle, Pyrrho of Elis behind (DL IV 33; Sextus Empiricus *PH* I 234 = LS 68 E). Plainly, Aristo thought there was a resemblance between Arcesilaus and Pyrrho, presumably one that did the former no credit. Might that
p. 551 resemblance have been the result of Pyrrho's influence on Arcesilaus? In ↳ which case the credit or blame for "founding" skepticism might belong to Pyrrho, whose rehabilitation by Aenesidemus would then have been a long overdue act of restitution.[38] Perhaps, but there are grounds for doubt. It is an object of scholarly controversy whether Pyrrho's principal motives were epistemological at all rather than obscurely metaphysical.[39] The Academic tradition neither acknowledges a debt to Pyrrho nor bothers to reject the charge that one is owed. Cicero knew of Pyrrho only as a moralist whose ideas died with him (Cicero *Luc*. 130; *Fin*. II 35, 43, III 11–12, IV 43, 49, 60, V 23; *TD* II 15, V 85). There is a real possibility that Aenesidemus, rather than drawing on Pyrrho as an original source of skeptical inspiration, instead interpreted Pyrrho in the light of the Academic philosophy (or the version of it he favored).

If this or something like it is correct, the question of Arcesilaus's originality stands. If my argument is on the right lines, Cicero preserves two versions of Arcesilaus and his legacy. According to the first, on display in the *Varro's* skeptical history (**T7**), Arcesilaus was already committed to a skeptical position and appealed to a tradition of like-minded precursors. According to this picture, he likely was vulnerable to the sophists' charge; he would have been an original intent on hiding his originality, which would, however, have consisted in an unreflective and self-refuting skepticism. The main evidence for the other, which I favor, is the *Lucullus*'s skeptical history and the appeal to Arcesilaus that forms a pendant to it (74–7, discussed earlier in this chapter). Philosophy's history is here viewed as a repository of diverse and conflicting views, some of them skeptical, others challenging conventional wisdom and each other. It furnishes material for arguments on both sides of the question, which serve both as a check on dogmatic rashness and as an instrument by which the Academics pursue truth or what is most like it (the first: Cicero *Luc*. 115, 124, 133; the second: Cicero *Luc*. 7, 60 and Cicero *DND* I 11–12). This picture is presumably meant to bring Arcesilaus closer to the kinds of Academic skepticism favored by Cicero, whose proponents' ardent pursuit of the truth is compatible with adherence to the first or to both the first and the second of the skeptical doctrines and is made possible by probability or verisimilitude.

But it is also friendlier to a dialectical interpretation of Arcesilaus. On such a reading, it is possible to see how he could have been an innovator while fairly claiming to have deep roots in tradition. His innovation was the invention of a skeptical system or position, which he fashioned out of materials furnished largely by the Stoics. The practice he set in train of arguing in defense of the skeptical position eventually gave rise to the forms of committed skepticism, radical and mitigated, whose adherents approved or even assented to one or both of the skeptical doctrines (Cicero *Luc*. 109–10; cf. *Luc.* 27, 29).[40] And the tradition begun in this way was extended, for all their differences, by the neo-Pyrrhonians. Arguments and considerations which had been scattered across various distinct schools and viewpoints, now find a home in the skeptical tradition. The Arcesilean "turn" did not direct the Academy down an already well marked skeptical path. Despite his dependence on ancient philosophy and sincere disavowals of originality, Arcesilaus blazed a new trail. The skeptical position that he forged out of inherited materials and bequeathed to tradition shaped the conception of skepticism that we
p. 552 inherit from antiquity, and it furnished succeeding generations of philosophers ↳ down to the present day with a lens through which his predecessors, their ideas, and their arguments could be regarded as precursors or

antecedents of it.[41] And this despite the fact that it is a matter of legitimate controversy whether Arcesilaus was, in some relevant senses of the term, a skeptic himself.

Notes

1. Long, this volume.

2. Ancient testimonies about Arcesilaus are collected in Mette 1984. By far our best source is Cicero, especially the *Academica*, the most recent critical edition of which is Reinhardt 2023a; an English translation with a commentary is supplied by Brittain 2006; a detailed commentary, with translations and supporting materials can be found in Reinhardt 2023b. On Arcesilaus in the *Academica*, see Ioppolo 2008. A few scraps of information are preserved in Philodemus's *Index Academicorum*, the most recent edition of which is Fleischer 2023 with a German translation; Kalligas, Tsouna and Hatzimichali 2020 provide an English translation of an older edition.

3. Sedley, this volume and Schwab, this volume.

4. Their differences and similarities were a much discussed issue, according to Aulus Gellius IX.5, and the subject of a now-lost book by Plutarch: *On the Difference between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics*. See Striker 2010.

5. Brochard 1887: 100; Zeller 1923, Vol. III 1: 507–10.

6. Cicero published two versions of the *Academica*: a first edition (the *Academica priora*) in two books, of which we have the second, the *Lucullus*, named after the Antiochian spokesman in it; and a second edition (the *Academica posteriora*) in four books, of which we have part of the first book, the *Varro*. The lost first book of the first edition, the *Catulus*, was named after a character who defends a version of Academic skepticism different from Cicero's. See Griffin 1997, Brittain 2006: xi–xix, and Reinhardt 2023b: clvii–clxxii.

7. Texts with translations of Numenius appear in Reinhardt 2023b: 818-36.

8. On Carneades, see Bett, this volume.

9. Translations from Greek and Latin are the author's own unless otherwise noted.

10. Schwab, this volume.

11. Cf. Cicero *Luc*. 28–9, 109. On these issues in the *Lucullus*, see Burnyeat 1997.

12. Cf. e.g, Couissin 1929a, Couissin 1929b, Striker 1980, Allen 1997.

13. Cf. Allen 1997.

14. Other references to Arcesilaus's and the Academics' attachment to argument on both sides of the question include Cicero *ND* I 11, II 168, *Fin*. II.1–2, V 10, *De or*. I 84, 80, 84, 107, *De or.* II 168, *Off*. II 8, *Varro* 16, 46, *Luc*. 7, 60, 104, *Tusc*. II 9, *Div*. II 150; Plutarch *St. Rep*. 1035, 1037c; Galen *De optimo docendi genere* 93, 15–17; cf. 100, 2–3 *CMG* V 1, 1 Barigazzi, Numenius fr. 26, 103–7 Des Places = Eusebius *Praep ev.* XIV 7, 15 (which do not mention Arcesilaus).

15. Cf. Long 1986.

16. To how many parties Sextus means to refer is unclear. An attractive emendation by von Arnim would make it plain that it was Arcesilaus alone: R.E. I, 2 (1895), 1168. I take it that Sextus is talking about Arcesilaus. See discussion in Heintz 1932: 98–100, Ioppolo 2009: 81–4.

17. Cf. Vogt 2010; Obdrzalek 2012.

p. 553 18. But the context contains some hints suggesting that Arcesilaus's intent was not wholly ad hominem, and the exclusively dialectical interpretation has not gone unchallenged, notably by Ioppolo 1986: 121–46; Ioppolo 2006: 81–4, 109–30.

19. Caston, this volume.

20. Cf. Meinwald 2005.

21. As transmitted, the conclusion of this argument appears unsatisfactory (153). Strictly speaking, it is the cognitive impression and not apprehension that is the criterion; even if we overlook this, nothing has been said so far to call into question the existence of such impressions or the possibility of assent to them. The burden of the argument, it seems, is simply that such acts of assent are not in between, and coequal with, knowledge and opinion.

22. Cf. Ioppolo 2009: 91–2.

23. According to an anecdote preserved by Diogenes Laertius, which does not mention Arcesilaus, Persaeus used twins to trick and so refute his and Arcesilaus's contemporary Ariston of Chios (VII 162).

24. Cf. Allen 1997: 246–51.

25. See Allen 2022 and Sedley, this volume.

26. Cf. Maconi 1988: 241 with note 32; Vezzoli 2016: 48–9 with note 115.

27. Cf. Ioppolo 1986: 59; Ioppolo 2009: 96.

28. Bett 2005: 34, note 7.

29. Bett, this volume.

30. For doubts about whether mitigated skepticism was espoused by Philo, see Reinhardt 2022, Reinhardt 2023b: xlv, 573–74.

31. Elsewhere Plutarch observes that the Stoics Chrysippus and Antipater "bent every nerve to show that there could not be an impulse without assent," which looks very much like a reply to an argument by Arcesilaus that there *could be* (Plutarch *St. Rep*. 1057 C = *SVF* 177).

32. Klein, this volume.

33. On the New Academy's appeals to the history of philosophy, see Brittain and Palmer 2001.

34. There is some reason to believe that this passage, which Cicero gives to his own character in the second edition (the *Varro*; see note 6), was spoken by Catulus in the first edition. Cf. Hirzel 1895, vol. I: note 4.

35. It is unfortunate that the surviving portion of the *Varro* breaks off after the sentence announcing the transition to Carneades. If, as some scholars think, the Academic history 44–6 goes back to Philo of Larissa (before his change of view in the so-called Roman books) the faults we perceive in Arcesilaus may have been corrected by Carneades, who on Philo's view explained how opinions, including the opinion that nothing can be apprehended could legitimately be held (cf. *Luc*. 59). There are signs of a move away from the line of *Varro* 44–6, or the first edition's version of the same, in the *praefatio* to the *Lucullus*, where Cicero says that the ancient philosophers, though discouraged by the manifold difficulties in their way, did not give up the search for truth (7).

36. Cooper 2004: 87, note 11 writes "As Cicero presents him, he grossly contradicts himself." Cf. Schofield 1999, Perin 2013.

37. Something has gone wrong in the account of Socrates, who is now said to have thought not that he knew nothing, but that nothing *can* be known (74). See Reid 1885: 264 n. *ad loc*.; Burnyeat 1997: 297–300; Allen 2018, 185–6.

38. On Pyrrho, see Long, this volume; on Aenesidemus's "Pyrrhonism," see Schwab, this volume.

p. 554 39. See Brennan 1998; Bett 2000; Brunschwig 1999.

40. Cf. Allen 2022.

41. See Long 1981 and Lee 2010.

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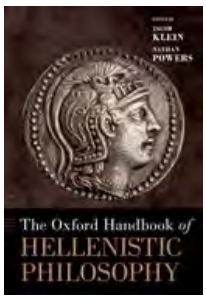
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CHAPTER

24 The Stoics and Carneades: Dialectic and the Holding of Views

Richard Bett

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the Stoics' support for their epistemology, especially the "cognitive impression," in the wake of Arcesilaus's challenge, and their continued insistence, against the Academics, that choice and action without assent are impossible. It then examines Carneades's responses to these moves: his renewed attack on the Stoic cognitive impression, his opposition to assent, and his vindication of the possibility of choice and action despite that. The latter includes both his account of persuasive impressions, and his distinction between assent and the more non-committal attitude of approval. The chapter interprets these as views accepted by Carneades himself; more generally, it opposes a reading of Carneades as engaged in purely dialectical activity. But the chapter sides with Cicero in choosing Clitomachus's reading of Carneades over Philo's, though the difference between these is smaller than on many interpretations.

Keywords: cognitive impression, persuasive impression, assent, approval, Carneades, Clitomachus, Cicero, Stoics

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The previous chapter has considered Arcesilaus's challenge to Stoic epistemology, especially to Zeno's notion of the cognitive impression (*phantasia katalêptikê*).[1] But Arcesilaus did not, of course, reduce the Stoics to silence on the subject. Plutarch cites an unnamed Stoic as rejoicing that between Arcesilaus (316/5–244/3 [or 241/0] BCE) and the other major skeptical Academic Carneades (214/3–129/8 BCE) came the Stoic Chrysippus (280/76–208/4 BCE), who not only provided written responses to Arcesilaus but also, in this Stoic's view, preemptively closed off various avenues of attack from Carneades (*Comm. not.* 1059B–C, LS 40G). Sextus attributes to the

Stoics generally what is clearly the same three-part definition of the cognitive impression that Cicero attributes to Zeno (worked out in part through debate with Arcesilaus, *Acad*. 2.77): it is an impression that

> 1) is from an existing thing, and
>
> 2) stamped and impressed in accordance with the existing thing itself,
>
> 3) such as could not come about from a non-existent thing.
>
> (*Math.* 7.248 < LS 40E, *SVF* 2.65)[2]

While there is room for dispute about exactly what is meant in each clause by "existing thing" (*huparchon*, or in Cicero's Latin, *quod est*), it is clear from both Sextus and Cicero that the force of the third clause is that the cognitive impression is such that there could not be an impression that was just like it, but *false* (Sextus, *Math*. 7.152, 252; Cicero, *Acad*. 2.112–13); the "non-existent thing" that the cognitive impression rules out is a non-existent *state of affairs*. Cognitive impressions, then, guarantee the truth of their contents.[3]

This three-part definition is never explicitly and specifically attributed to Chrysippus himself, but there is no reason whatever to doubt that he adhered to it. First, views generically attributed to the Stoics may be assumed
p. 557 to have been held by Chrysippus, the ↳ great systematizer of the school, unless there is strong evidence against this. Second, the context in which the Stoic cited by Plutarch says that Chrysippus responded to Arcesilaus and headed off Carneades's criticisms is epistemological; Chrysippus, we are told, "left to sense-perception many aids against siege, and entirely removed the fuss about preconceptions and conceptions, articulating each one and putting it where it belongs."[4] Clearly this exercise would have included a vindication of the cognitive impression, given its importance in both previous and subsequent Stoic thinking. Third, whether or not we agree that Chrysippus had the upper hand, Carneades is elsewhere reported as continuing Arcesilaus's challenge to the cognitive impression (Sextus, *Math*. 7.402), while Cicero reports that the dispute between Stoics and Academics on this issue has continued to his own time (*Acad*. 2.78). We can be pretty sure that Chrysippus had a stake in this dispute.

It would be interesting to know more about what these "aids to sense-perception" were, and how precisely Chrysippus clarified the status of "preconceptions and conceptions," but Plutarch does not elaborate. In what follows, I shall first try, by appealing to related evidence, to spell out a little further what Chrysippus's support of Stoic epistemology may have consisted in. But there is another aspect to his response to the Academics in this area, namely the so-called *apraxia* ("inaction") argument, and I shall continue with a look at this. The rest of the chapter will then concentrate on Carneades's contributions to this ongoing debate with the Stoics, including both his counter-arguments against the Stoics and his responses to the *apraxia* charge.

1. Support for Stoic Epistemology and the Charge of *Apraxia*

The two parts of Plutarch's report I have just quoted include the particles *men* and *de* respectively, which imply a connection but also a contrast between the two points: Chrysippus said some things about sense-perception *but also* some things about preconceptions and conceptions. The point of the contrast must be that preconceptions and conceptions have to do with reason, not the senses. An important text of Aetius (4.11.1–4, LS 39E) tells us that the growth of rationality in the early years of human life consists in the "writing" of conceptions (*ennoiai*) on the blank page that is the soul at birth. This occurs, at least initially, through repeated perceptions of similar objects that cluster into a consolidated "experience" (*empeiria*).[5] Some of these conceptions are said to arise naturally and automatically, others through human instruction, and the former are called, more specifically, "preconceptions" (*prolêpseis*); on this last point, Diogenes Laertius also ascribes to Chrysippus the idea of preconception as a "natural conception of universals" (7.54). Since the Stoics consider nature providential, this amounts to saying that preconceptions give us an accurate way of seeing things; the way our natures prompt us to classify the world through our concepts corresponds to how the world is. ↳ It is
p. 558 no surprise that in the same place Diogenes cites Chrysippus as saying that preconception is a criterion of truth.[6] This is not to cast doubt on the reliability of those conceptions that are not preconceptions; but preconceptions have a kind of additional anchor that makes them especially trustworthy.

Alongside preconception, according to Diogenes, Chrysippus also said that sense-perception (*aisthêsis*) was a criterion of truth. This takes us to the other side of the contrast marked by Plutarch; the way he states the matter implies that Chrysippus also bolstered the credibility of sense-perception, separately from his elucidation of the roles of conception and preconception. It is not so clear what this may have amounted to; but we can maybe get some idea from the remarks on the power of the senses that Cicero in the *Academica* gives Lucullus, the spokesman for Antiochus, who at least in epistemology follows the Stoic line. Lucullus begins as follows: "Let's start with the senses. Their judgments are so clear and certain that if human nature were given the choice—if a god demanded of it whether it is satisfied with its senses when they are sound and undamaged or whether it requires something better—I can't see what more it could ask for" (*Acad*. 2.19).[7] Lucullus goes on to speak of the ways in which our senses, already so effective in judging things, can be yet further refined by training of various kinds (e.g., in painting or music) (2.20). Of course, the senses can occasionally deceive us. But one can well imagine Chrysippus pointing, in a similar spirit to Lucullus, to how flawless the workings of the senses are in innumerable everyday cases. Diogenes Laertius reports that he wrote seven books *About Ordinary Experience* (*Peri Sunêtheias*, 7.198), which presumably expanded on these matters.[8] In the same place we are told that he also wrote six books *Against Ordinary Experience*, which must have discussed reasons for doubting the senses. But Plutarch quotes a passage of Chrysippus making clear that the point of this was to undermine any arguments to that effect, much as an attorney will try to demolish an opponent's case before the opponent even has the chance to make it (*Sto. rep*. 1036A).[9]

In addition, of course, the division between the senses and reason is itself artificial. For one thing, I have already noted, at least at the early stages the growth of preconceptions takes place via the senses. But more importantly, according to the Stoics the impressions of rational beings, including their sensory impressions, are rational through and through. We do not first have non-rational sense-perceptions that reason then has to interpret; our sensory impressions have linguistically expressible content from the start—they are impressions (as) *of certain states of affairs obtaining*. If one puts into words what one is seeing, the verbal expression may of course come later. But as Diogenes Laertius puts it, "thought, which is capable of utterance, expresses in words *what it experiences by the impression*" (7.49); the rationally structured content is already there in the impression. So, if reason and the senses are as closely intertwined as this, and reason is oriented toward the truth as indicated just now, so much the better for the senses too.

Here, then, is a sketch of the kinds of argument we can guess Chrysippus to have offered to support the Stoics' generally optimistic epistemology against Academic attack—and in particular, to support their central

contention that the cognitive impression not only exists but is a commonplace occurrence for any normal
p. 559 human being.[10] ↳ Now, as I already noted, the cognitive impression is supposed to be a guarantee of truth. But Arcesilaus had refused to accept that there could be any such self-guaranteeing impression (*Math*. 7.154, *Acad*. 2.77).[11] And he had argued that this gave the Stoics two choices: for any given impression that confronts them, they can either assent to it—that is, commit themselves to the truth of the impression—or not do so. In the former case, they would be holding an opinion (*doxa*)—that is, assent to a non-cognitive impression—which to them was anathema. In the latter case, they would suspend judgment. But if there are *no* cognitive impressions, this is always going to be the choice; and so, to avoid holding opinions, one will have to suspend judgment about *everything* (*Math*. 7.156–7).

The inadmissibility of opinion seems to have been common ground between Arcesilaus and his Stoic opponents. Where they disagreed was on the possibility of suspending judgment about everything. And it is clear that, long after Arcesilaus's time, the Stoics continued to insist on its impossibility. It is this that forms the other side of the Stoic attack on Academic thinking, extending to Carneades and beyond. In addition to supporting their own epistemology, the Stoics ask, how is suspension of judgment compatible with the decisions and actions that we all engage in every day? This is the *apraxia* charge. The charge can come in various different versions, but there seem to be two issues of particular importance in the Stoic–Academic debate. First, how can one make choices among alternative courses of action without discriminating in favor of some impressions and against others? And second, whether or not a choice of that kind is involved, how is action even possible except via judgments about the way the world is?[12]

The *apraxia* charge occurs in Lucullus's speech in Cicero's *Academica* (e.g., 2.37–9, which seems to include both the versions just mentioned). But the most chronologically specific report of the charge occurs in Plutarch, who says that both Chrysippus and Antipater devoted "the most argument," in their disputes with the Academics, to the following point: "that there is neither action nor impulse without assent, and that those who maintain that, when a suitable impression has occurred, there is an impulse right away, without their having yielded or assented, are talking fictions and empty suppositions" (*Sto. rep.* 1057A, LS 53S). The point is not developed; Plutarch immediately goes on to accuse Chrysippus of saying something else that contradicts it.[13] And one can imagine it being used in either of the two ways I have distinguished: either that choice among alternatives, or that *doing* anything at all, requires assenting to certain things being the case. But it underlines the importance of assent in the Stoic theory of action. The Stoics take impulse (*hormê*) to be the proximate cause of action, and impulse is a response to the way the world appears to the agent.[14] But the impulses of rational beings are not simply automatic reactions to the impressions with which they are presented. One has to *endorse* the impressions before they can have any practical effect; that is, one has to assent to them or, in other words, take them to be true.

That Chrysippus insisted on this point implies that someone before him had already denied it. The obvious candidate is Arcesilaus; and support to this is given by a passage of Plutarch's *Against Colotes*, which defends the possibility of action without assent against the attacks of both the Stoics and Colotes himself (*Adv. Col.* 1122A–F,
p. 560 LS 69A).[15] ↳ Arcesilaus is not mentioned by name in the passage itself. But Colotes and Arcesilaus were rough contemporaries, and Plutarch mentions their intellectual confrontation immediately beforehand (1121E–1122A). However, it is not just Chrysippus who is said, in the previous Plutarch passage, to have insisted on the necessity of assent for action; it is also Antipater, who was Carneades's contemporary and who is said to have sparred with him at great length.[16] We can hardly doubt, then, that Carneades was the main opponent Antipater had in mind on this topic. And indeed, Cicero reports, on the authority of Clitomachus, that Carneades "had driven assent—that is, opinion and rashness—from our minds, like a wild and savage beast," and likens this to a Herculean labor (*Acad*. 2.108). This point will be of some importance in what follows.

Thus, Carneades faces two challenges from the Stoics. First, there is the revived and enhanced account of the cognitive impression that is due to Chrysippus. And second, there is the enduring Stoic complaint that action and impulse without assent is impossible, at least for a rational being. So, it is not surprising that there is

evidence both of his having argued against the feasibility of the cognitive impression, and of his having developed an account of how choice and action are possible despite there being no cognitive impressions or, for that matter, any other criterion of truth, in the strong sense in which a criterion is a *guarantee* of truth. These are not, of course, the only areas in which Carneades had things to say. We know that he was also active at least in debates in ethics, which are the subject of the next chapter, as well as in theology (Sextus, *Math*. 9.182–90).[17] But the matters on which I am concentrating are, it is fair to say, central topics of philosophical methodology. I now turn my attention directly to Carneades, with a focus on these.

2. Carneades's Critique of the Stoic Cognitive Impression

Carneades's attack on the cognitive impression is in one way the same as Arcesilaus's: it is focused on the third clause of its definition, "such as could not come about from a non-existent thing" (Sextus, *Math*. 7.402). His point is simply that for any true impression, there could be a false one indistinguishable from it; hence no impression can be self-guaranteeing in the way the Stoics claim. Sextus goes on to mention numerous examples that are supposed to illustrate this indistinguishability, which fall into two broad categories—altered mental states (dreams, madness, etc.) and doppelgängers (twins, pairs of eggs, etc.) (*Math*. 7.403–10); and Cicero confirms the Academics' use of these (*Acad*. 2.84–5, 88–90). The examples may predate Carneades—Diogenes Laertius cites the early Stoic Persaeus using a pair of twins to trick his fellow-Stoic Aristo (7.162)—but the evidence suggests that Carneades was the one to develop them in detail.[18]

But Sextus also reports a more comprehensive approach to this issue on Carneades's part: he "positioned
p. 561 himself on the criterion of truth not only against the Stoics but ↳ against everyone before him" (*Math*. 7.159). This kind of global ambition seems to be characteristic of Carneades; according to Cicero, his division of ethical ends also purported to review all possible opinions on the subject (*Fin*. 5.16).[19] In any case, Sextus continues by summarizing an argument from Carneades against the existence of any criterion (*Math*. 7.159–65). This starts by observing that any faculty one might choose as a criterion can deceive us (7.159). But then, apparently as a backup, it claims that any criterion must in the end come down to the deliverances of ordinary sense-perception reacting to something that affects it—in other words, to sensory impressions (7.160–3). Against this as a criterion, it brings up the familiar point that there can be no true impression such that there could not be a false one just like it (7.164)—which suggests that despite his seemingly global ambition, Carneades continues to have the Stoics especially in mind. And then it argues that reason could not be a criterion, since reason must take off from impressions of the kind he has just been talking about. The conclusion is then that "neither non-rational sense-perception nor reason can be a criterion" (7.165).

It seems clear that the Stoics would not be convinced by this. For as we have seen, they do not accept a distinction between reason and "non-rational sense-perception" (*alogos aisthêsis*). While reason may have developed via sensory experience in early childhood, they hold that in a mature human being sensory experience is infused with rationality; reason does not interpret non-rational sensory data that is separate from itself. This might not give them an immediate response to the claim of indistinguishability. But if sensory experience is conceptually rich, and conceptions are formed, as they claim, through memory, then in looking at the world, we are bringing to bear a large body of previous knowledge that shapes how we see it. And this might very well give us ways of ruling out indistinguishable false impressions. We may not be able to tell we are dreaming when we are dreaming; but in that case we are not employing our rationally infused sensory capacities. When we are employing them, we are perfectly capable of telling that we are not dreaming—and a great deal else about what is going on around us. And while we may sometimes give up on trying to distinguish two objects, such as eggs, our background knowledge can often allow us to dismiss the kinds of possibilities Carneades raises. So, at least, the Stoics could argue. On the other hand, there is much about this story that Carneades could challenge—most obviously, the teleologically based account of the development of our reason on which it depends.

So, it seems as if the dispute about the criterion of truth is at a stalemate, and this was always likely; it is no surprise that, as Cicero says, the viability of the third clause in the Stoics' definition of the cognitive impression was a point of contention from Zeno and Arcesilaus to his own day (*Acad*. 2.77–8). Now, one might say that a stalemate is precisely what Carneades wants. He is in the business of suspending judgment, not of accepting anything himself; and this should surely include the question whether there is any criterion of truth, Stoic or otherwise. But both Sextus and Cicero suggest something different. In the passages where he reports the arguments against the criterion, Sextus is not explicit about Carneades's intentions. But at the opening of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, he distinguishes the Academy of Carneades and Clitomachus from himself in that they,
p. 562 unlike him, maintain that the truth cannot be apprehended—that is, that no ↳ reliable criterion, guaranteeing truth, is available (*PH* 1.1–3). And when he discusses the Academy, in his review of positions that should not be confused with his own, he repeats that the New Academy (that is, Carneades and Clitomachus) affirm that everything is inapprehensible (*PH* 1.226).[20] Cicero tells us the same thing. Antipater is reported as saying that someone who holds that nothing is apprehensible should at least claim to apprehend *that*; and Carneades then denies this—if one holds that *nothing* is apprehensible, that should include the very statement that nothing is apprehensible (*Acad*. 2.28).[21] We shall come back to the issue of what it means to hold something without claiming to apprehend it. But what Carneades emphatically does not do here is reject the attribution to himself of the view that nothing can be apprehended. So, the best evidence suggests this was a conclusion that he in some sense accepted; he was not just balancing anti-criterion arguments against the Stoics' positive position with a view to suspension of judgment.

3. Carneades's Response to the *Apraxia* Charge

Having reported Carneades's arguments against any criterion of truth, Sextus immediately says that Carneades is compelled to provide a criterion for the conduct of life (*Math*. 7.166); and there follows an elaborate account of Carneades's theory of the "persuasive impression" (*pithanê phantasia*) (*Math*. 7.166–89). While Sextus himself elsewhere distinguishes criteria of truth from criteria of action (*PH* 1.21), it does not look as if he has that distinction in mind here, since he later refers to the persuasive impression as Carneades's criterion of truth (*Math*. 7.173). It is not, however, a criterion of truth in the full sense, since Sextus is quite explicit that persuasive impressions can occasionally turn out to be false (*Math*. 7.175). Indeed, this was already hinted at earlier when, in introducing the arguments against any criterion of truth, Sextus said that Carneades aimed to show that nothing is a criterion of truth "without qualification" (*haplôs*, *Math*. 7.159); the persuasive impression, then, is a criterion in a qualified sense. That aside, however, it is clear from Sextus, and from a good deal of corroborating evidence in Cicero's *Academica* (e.g., 2.99), that the persuasive impression was intended as at least part of Carneades's answer to the question how choice and action are possible if one avoids assent.

According to Sextus's report, impressions can be assessed in their objective or their subjective aspect. Objectively, they are either true or false, while subjectively, they are either apparently true or not—and if they are apparently true, the degree to which they strike us as true can vary. A persuasive impression is one that is apparently true and strikes us as true to at least a considerable degree, although, among those that clear that threshold, there is room for further variation in degrees of persuasiveness (*Math*. 7.168–75). Yet, as noted just
p. 563 now, no amount of persuasiveness can amount to a guarantee of ↳ truth; this is not a criterion in the Stoic style. But that is no cause for alarm; we manage in ordinary life with something less than full certainty, and in practice it works pretty well to rely on those impressions that strike us as true, even if occasionally one will deceive us (*Math*. 7.175).

Suppose, though, that one wants greater confidence. The report continues by describing two further steps one can take. First, one can compare multiple impressions for their consistency with one another; if a whole cluster of impressions points in the same direction, that is more persuasive than a single isolated persuasive impression—and here too there are differences of degree (*Math*. 7.176–81). Second, one can go back and check

to see whether there was anything in the circumstances of these impressions that might lead one to distrust them; if not, one's confidence becomes greater still (*Math*. 7.181–3).[22] The importance of the matters at stake (7.184) and the amount of time one has for consideration (7.185–9) will obviously affect what level of scrutiny one brings to bear. Again, none of this will give one absolute certainty. But the idea seems to be that this is a perfectly adequate model of how practical reasoning—even on the most important questions, those surrounding happiness and how to achieve it (*Math*. 7.184)—can occur in the absence of any infallible criterion. And it is worth emphasizing that at least these higher two levels of persuasiveness clearly do involve active reasoning; rather than simply registering the level of persuasiveness in a given impression, one takes deliberate steps to get the most persuasive impressions possible, and acts accordingly. Carneades has taken pains to give us a picture of human agency, as opposed to mere instinctual reacting.

Yet, if we take the evidence of Cicero seriously, all of this is supposed to happen without assent (*Acad*. 2.108). This may well seem problematic. Does not deciding that an impression is sufficiently persuasive, and acting on it, amount to assenting to its truth? At one point at the close of his account, Sextus does use the language of assent (*Math*. 7.188). But either this is a mistake, or "assent" here means something weaker than a definite commitment to truth; for, as we saw earlier, Antipater continued to hammer the point that action required assent, which would have made no sense if Carneades had conceded it. This takes us to the other version of the *apraxia* charge, and to an important passage of Cicero's *Academica* that seems designed to answer it (2.104).

Cicero says that he is giving us Clitomachus's account of Carneades's way of handling this objection. He tells us that Clitomachus used "almost these words" (*his fere verbis*, 2.102), so he is clearly trying to be as accurate as possible. What he says is that there are two ways in which one might be said to avoid assent. One might refrain from giving one's entire assent on any matter.[23] Or one might refrain even from approving or disapproving anything, so that one gives no affirmative or negative answers to any questions. According to Clitomachus, Carneades held that the person of good sense (the "wise person") will withhold assent in the first sense but not the second; it is possible to approve, or "follow," or "use," impressions in deciding how to act, or in responding to questions, without at any point giving full-scale assent. Cicero ends the report by saying that one does not of course approve all impressions, but only the ones that are not impeded by anything, which is surely a reference
p. 564 to the higher level of persuasiveness ↳ where one has compared multiple impressions with one another to see if they are consistent.[24]

The question now is what this distinction amounts to. What is the lesser form of acceptance of impressions, which does not amount to full-scale assent but is sufficient for action and debate? One common way of reading this is that one allows the impressions to affect one's actions, including one's speech acts, without taking them to be true. This is how Sextus explains the impressions that he says are the skeptic's criterion of action (*PH* 1.21–4). But this interpretation does not seem to do justice to the extent to which the account of persuasive impressions stresses their orientation toward the truth.[25] A persuasive impression, by definition, is one that gives a strong impression of being true. And the whole point of the higher levels of persuasiveness is to make that impression even stronger. The more it feels as if the impression is true, then, the better. This interpretation fits well also with Cicero's talk of his own goal as finding something "like the truth" (*simile veri*, *Acad*. 2.66), and of the Academics in general as aiming for truth or something as close to it as possible (*Acad*. 2.7). So, the impressions on which one can rely in making choices, according to this picture, are those one finds likely—or, if you like, probable.

I do not *translate* Sextus's term *pithanos* as "probable" because I prefer to keep the link with the verb *peithô* ("persuade"), from which it derives.[26] But the persuasive impression is in fact one that strikes the subject as probable—that is *why* it is persuasive—and I do not consider Cicero's translation *probabilis*, which does seem to have connotations of likelihood or probability, as fundamentally misleading. To be sure, this is not probability in some mathematical sense; to speak of an impression as likely or probable is simply to say that one is inclined to regard it as true.[27] This retains a subjective element, in that to call an impression likely or probable is to make an implied allusion to one's judgment or belief. But the judgment or belief in question is about the *truth* of the

impression. It is not easy to spell out exactly what this judgment amounts to; but one might do so by saying that it is a counterfactual judgment to the effect that if, for some reason, one had to decide whether or not the impression was true, one *would* decide—with a range of degrees of possible strength, depending on the strength of the probability—that it was true.[28] And in this respect the persuasive impression is not merely attractive in some purely psychological sense.

But in fact, of course, the Academic does not have to decide; and this brings us back to the issue of assent. The discussion of the last two paragraphs allows us to make sense of the distinction we saw in the Cicero passage, between full-scale assent and a lesser notion of "approval," which could allow for choice and action, including playing a role in discussions, but without assent of the full-scale kind.[29] To assent in the full-scale fashion to some impression, or to a proposition that spells out the content of an impression, is to commit oneself to its truth. But one can very well consider an impression *likely* to be true, and rely on it for that reason in one's actions and speech, without making any such commitment. And the fact that persuasive impressions never reach the point of guaranteeing their truth makes that uncommitted attitude quite understandable. So, the
p. 565 Academics can have an orientation toward the truth—which Cicero says they ↳ do—without ever coming down decisively in favor of anything being true. This, then, is what approval amounts to. It is not simply letting oneself be carried passively along by a subjective feeling, for it can involve active investigation in the service of improving one's chances of being correct. But it remains content with reflecting on the *chances* of being correct, rather than making a final ruling on the truth of things. This seems to me the best way of combining the various clues about Carneades, primarily from Sextus and Cicero, into a single coherent picture.

Notice that this picture allows an Academic to hold views, even philosophical views, provided that one does not claim to be sure about them. As we saw, the attitude of approval can be applied to things one says as well as to things one does; it allows one to answer yes or no to questions, and if that is the case, there is no reason why it should not also allow one to advance theories, supported by the most persuasive considerations one can find in their favor. The crucial thing is just that one must advance them as truth-*like* rather than as the truth. And among the views the Academic might put forward in this tentative way might be the view that there is no such thing as the Stoic cognitive impression, or any other criterion of truth (of the strong kind that is supposed to *guarantee* truth). As we saw, Cicero seems to attribute this view to Carneades, while also making clear that he insisted that it was not itself to be taken as something he claimed to have apprehended (*Acad*. 2.28). Sextus, too, says that Carneades claimed that nothing could be apprehended (*PH* 1.1–3, 226); he also says that the Academics of Carneades's time maintained many things as persuasive (*PH* 1.226–30). Sextus is often thought to be unfair to the Academics, and especially to Carneades. There is some truth to this; he omits the crucial distinction in Cicero between approval and full-scale assent, which makes Carneades look more dogmatic than, on the reading I have argued for, he really is. Nevertheless, if we correct for this omission, the picture he gives of Carneades does not seem unwarranted. *What* views Carneades may have held, besides the view that Stoic-style apprehension is impossible, is not easy to say; Sextus suggests that some of them had to do with good and bad (*PH* 1.226), but he does not give any detail. We shall come back to this issue in §5. But if I am right, Sextus has some basis for marking a significant divide between Carneades's Academy and his own brand of Pyrrhonism.

4. Clitomachus Versus Philo on Carneades

The interpretation of Carneades that I have offered may seem to have brought him too close to the late Academy of Philo of Larissa. There is good reason to think that Philo allowed the holding of views, and this may well have been part of what led Aenesidemus to have regarded the Academy of his own day, in the words of a report by Photius, as "Stoics fighting Stoics" (*Bibl*. 170a12–15, LS 71C9), and to have abandoned the Academy
p. 566 to found his own new Pyrrhonist skeptical movement.[30] But it is usually thought that ↳ this represents a backing down from a more rigorously suspensive attitude adhered to by Carneades and his immediate successor Clitomachus. It is also often thought to represent a new reading—more specifically, a misreading—of what Carneades himself was up to, as compared with the original, more accurate reading of Clitomachus.[31]

The idea that Philo was less skeptical than his Academic predecessors seems well attested.[32] However, the idea of a split within the Academy *on how to understand Carneades* has a narrow basis.[33] That is, the evidence for such a split is not insignificant, but it centers around one specific point: whether the wise person would hold opinions. Cicero several times mentions this as something that Carneades is said to have accepted (*Acad*. 2.59, 78, 148). But he never endorses this understanding of Carneades. And in one of these places (2.78) he distinguishes between Clitomachus's and Philo's (and Metrodorus's) views of Carneades, saying that while Carneades did indeed *argue for* the conclusion that the wise person would have opinions, that is not the same as saying that he approved it. Philo thought that he did approve it, but Clitomachus took him to be merely advancing it for argument's sake—and he, Cicero, sides with Clitomachus on this question. While Cicero does not elaborate, it is easy enough to imagine the kind of context in which Carneades might have argued for this conclusion without accepting it.[34] Suppose Antipater insisted on the necessity of assent for action (as we have seen that he did); Carneades might have responded, "Well in that case, since your cognitive impression is a fiction, your vaunted wise person will have to end up holding opinions."

Now opinion, as we noted earlier, is assent to a non-cognitive impression, and the Stoics wanted nothing to do with it. What the dispute between Clitomachus and Philo comes down to, then, is whether—according to Carneades (whom each of them claimed to be following)—assenting to a non-cognitive impression was ever acceptable. And a crucial element in answering that question is the distinction between assent and the more non-committal attitude of "approval" that we examined in §3. To repeat, Antipater continued to press the point that action without assent was impossible (*Sto. rep.* 1057A, LS 53S), and Carneades counted it a great achievement to have banished assent (*Acad*. 2.108). And this means that developing the alternative attitude of approval was important to him—important because it allowed him to vindicate the possibility of choice, action and debate without assent, and hence to avoid opinion. All this seems to support Clitomachus's understanding of Carneades, and Cicero's endorsement of it, and to undermine Philo's (again, as a reading of Carneades—his adoption of it as his own view is another matter).

So, I accept the prevailing consensus that Clitomachus, and not Philo, got Carneades right. Clitomachus was historically and personally much closer to Carneades; he is said to have written more than 400 books, in which elucidation of Carneades was a central purpose (Diogenes Laertius 4.67).[35] And according to another work of Cicero (*Orator* 51), Carneades is said to have stated that Clitomachus shared his own mind-set. All this tends to boost his credibility, even apart from the argument I have just offered. But the distinction between the two ways of understanding Carneades, as I am proposing it, is a subtle one. On the reading that I have pursued, following Clitomachus via Cicero, Carneades does allow the holding of views, provided they are only approved
p. 567 and not ↳ assented to. On Philo's reading, one may assent to the views one holds, and hence have opinions. Of course, in calling them opinions, one would be admitting that they are not apprehended, and that one could be wrong; and this is emphasized in one of the passages of Cicero where this reading is mentioned (*Acad*. 2.148). The only difference, then, is in whether one declares these views to be true (while allowing for the possibility that one is mistaken), or whether one merely considers them likely—where this includes an aspiration toward

truth, but no claim, even provisionally, to have achieved it. This is indeed much less of an interpretive divide between the two sides than is often supposed.[36]

The matter is further complicated by a surprising admission on Cicero's own part. Having said, as we saw earlier, that he hopes to find something "like the truth" (*Acad*. 2.66), he goes on to say that, not being a wise person, he cannot claim never to hold opinions; in fact, he says, he is a great "opinionator" (*opinator*, a word coined for this very purpose, 2.66). He also says, "I yield to impressions and cannot resist them," even while not pretending to have apprehended them (2.66). Some scholars have taken Cicero to be expressing pride in his adoption of opinions.[37] But the passage I just quoted, in addition to the repeated emphasis on the fact that he is not wise, seem to me clear indications of the opposite: he is showing regret at his inability to live up to the ideal he professes.[38] "Cannot resist" is a confession of weakness, and "great opinionator" is ironic.[39] Now, so far there is nothing to upset the picture I have laid out. However, some confusion is introduced by the language Cicero uses to lead up to his confession of opinion. He says, "I am not someone who never approves [*adprobem*] anything false, who never assents, who never holds an opinion" (2.66). And just before this, he says, "But just as I judge this most beautiful, seeing the truth, so it is most disgraceful to accept [*probare*] falsehoods in place of truths."

The trouble here is that he is running together the terminology that, if my interpretation is correct, he should be scrupulously keeping distinct. Assent and opinion are the attitudes that Carneades (as I understand him) insists on avoiding. But *approval* (*adprobari*) was precisely the attitude that, in contrast to those, he was willing to adopt, according to the crucial report from Clitomachus (*Acad*. 2.104); and "accept" (*probari*) sounds (here and elsewhere) like a minor variant of this. For someone who has that attitude, accepting or approving a falsehood in place of a truth is nothing disgraceful; while one should of course do one's best to avoid this (and the higher levels of persuasiveness, as we saw, can help in that respect), occasional falsehood, as Sextus's report made clear, was no problem (*Math*. 7.175). It is *assenting* to a falsehood (which would be holding an opinion) that is the thing to be avoided at all costs. In starting with the language of approval and shifting to the language of assent and opinion, Cicero seems to be blurring this vital distinction.

I can think of three possible explanations for this, consistent with the interpretation I have offered. First, this is a lapse on his part, a failure to maintain the clarity that he elsewhere seems to show about the distinction between assent and approval. Second, since this passage comes very early in his speech, and the distinction and much else connected with it have not yet been explained, he is not overly concerned about exact
p. 568 terminology. And third, since he is here confessing a failure to live up to an ideal, he deliberately blurs ↳ the distinction, because a slide from approval (which Carneades would allow) into assent and opinion (which he would not) is precisely the error that he is confessing. As I said, the distinction is a subtle one, and in admitting his own weakness, he is perhaps drawing attention to how hard it is to maintain. This last explanation is the most charitable to Cicero, since it gives him the most credit for knowing exactly what he is doing. But if it is correct, of course, the reader cannot be expected to understand what he is doing on a first reading; only after reading the whole work, and coming to see the distinction between assent and approval, could one be expected to go back and appreciate how carefully Cicero has portrayed his own failure. This would be an exquisite touch on his part; while "charitable" is not always the same as "correct," I certainly hope this is the right way to understand him. In any case, this passage, which is telling us how *not* to behave, need not be seen as undermining the reading I have put forward.

5. Carneades as Not Purely Dialectical

Recent scholarship on Carneades has been much occupied with the question whether his philosophical activity is purely "dialectical." That is, is he merely showing the Stoics, or other philosophers with whom he may engage in debate, the consequences of *their* views, or offering counter-arguments to their arguments with a view to driving *them* to suspension of judgment, rather than offering any views of his own? On that interpretation, we would know nothing at all about what, if anything, Carneades himself accepted; all we would see him doing is reacting to the ideas of others.

Now, it is safe to say that much of Carneades's argumentative activity was indeed dialectical. We saw in §4 that Carneades gave arguments to the effect that the wise person might hold opinions, but that, at least as Clitomachus saw it, these were part of a strategy of counter-argument against the Stoics, rather than being accepted by Carneades himself. It looks as if the same is true of Carneades's arguments about the highest good. We are told that he argued for a view of the highest good as the enjoyment of the primary things recommended by nature—as opposed to the state of aiming for these things, as the Stoics had proposed—but that he did so as a counterbalance to the Stoics, not because he held it himself (Cicero, *Acad*. 2.131, *Fin*. 5.20). We are also told that he argued enthusiastically for a different view, Calliphon's view of the highest good as pleasure along with the honorable—so much so that he even seemed to approve it (*Acad*. 2.139).[40] The "seemed" suggests that he was not forthcoming about his intentions (more on this in a moment); and it is at least natural to wonder whether this too was something he argued for with a motivation other than simply wishing to promote the view on its own merits.[41] Another apparent case of dialectical activity are Carneades's arguments on fate and free will; as Cicero reports in *On Fate*, he takes on various aspects of both the Epicurean and the Stoic views on this subject,
p. 569 playing them off against one another ↳ and introducing his own philosophically fruitful alternatives: agent causation (in preference to the Epicurean swerve) and rejection of the link, assumed by both schools, between determinism and bivalence (*Fat*. 23–6, 31–3). Finally, we should note that even Carneades's account of persuasive impressions has a clear anti-Stoic aspect to it. The Stoics themselves categorized impressions as persuasive or unpersuasive (Sextus, *Math*. 7.242–3)—without, of course, regarding the persuasive ones as any kind of criterion. And when the later Stoics, as reported by Sextus, modified their account of the cognitive impression to say that it served as a criterion of truth only "when it has no obstacle" (*Math*. 7.253), it looks as if they are borrowing from Carneades's notion of the impression that is more persuasive because "unimpeded," which gives us good reason to think that Carneades used this notion in the course of debate with the Stoics.[42]

So Carneades no doubt spent much of his time engaged in arguments with philosophers of other schools. But to say that he devoted much attention to dialectical activity, rather than advancing views of his own, is not to say that he never did anything else, and that everything he is reported as saying was designed to serve as a counterbalance to someone else's views, or to force on them an unwelcome consequence. In fact, the only reason one would want to insist on an exclusively dialectical reading of Carneades is if one thought that, quite generally, he was not inclined, or not entitled, to hold views of his own, so that the many philosophically interesting things he is reported as saying must *always* be read in this other fashion. And this, for the reasons I have explained, seems a mistake.[43] If one draws a distinction between full-scale assent, and the lesser attitude of approval, and allows that a wise person can adopt the latter, there is no reason whatever why one should not hold views, albeit in this less committed fashion; one can accept them as persuasive without definitely declaring them to be correct. The theory of the persuasive impression, and its various degrees and levels, can itself be accepted as persuasive; so can the very distinction between assent and approval; and so can the denial that anything can be apprehended—which, as we saw, Carneades is reported to have accepted, but not in the manner of apprehension (Cicero, *Acad*. 2.28). And all this, of course, can be understood as consistent with a suspension of judgment on his own part—that is, a resolute avoidance of definite claims to truth—that will keep him broadly in the Academic tradition initiated, according to Diogenes Laertius, by Arcesilaus, of "suspending his assertions because of the oppositions of arguments" (4.28).

Which views Carneades accepted, is likely to remain something of a mystery. The last case just mentioned is cited as a view Carneades held, and I have referred to a few cases where our sources suggest that he was arguing for a view he did *not* accept. Beyond this, it may be hard to tell. When Cicero says that Carneades argued for Calliphon's view on the highest good so strongly that he seemed to accept it, he adds immediately that Clitomachus said he could never figure out what Carneades approved (*Acad*. 2.139). If Clitomachus, Carneades's closest confidant, could not figure this out, it is unlikely that we will. But notice that this at least implies that there were *some* views he accepted; if Carneades's activity was purely dialectical, Clitomachus
p. 570 would have known the answer—it would have been "none."[44] And so, I suspect ↳ Carneades was deliberately somewhat evasive on this issue. If his philosophical energy was frequently spent on arguing with others, specifically on often arguing for things he did not himself accept, it might very well be hard to tell what he accepted and what he did not. It might even have been an advantage to encourage this ambiguity, in so far as views that one merely approved, in the sense we have seen, might well be less firmly embraced, and more easily shed in light of new considerations, than those of whose truth one was sure.[45]

Nonetheless, I strongly suspect that the two connected methodological views—the account of the persuasive impression, and the distinction between assent and approval—*were* views that he accepted. If one resolutely resists assent, but has successfully reached the conclusion that choice, action, and philosophical views are possible *without* assent, there would just be no point in not accepting that conclusion oneself.[46] As we saw, Sextus says that Carneades *had to* provide the account of the persuasive impression in order to explain how action was possible (*Math*. 7.166), and this may seem to show that the account was for his own use. I am not sure that this follows; the compulsion might have come from the fact that even in a dialectical context, one has to allow the possibility of action in order for one's arguments to be credible.[47] Nevertheless, that it was meant for his own use seems highly plausible. So, Carneades emerges as a philosopher with views of his own. He is cagey about which views he holds, and whatever views he holds, he does so in a specially reserved way. But sometimes, at least, he is giving us his own ideas; he is not *only* responding to the ideas of others.[48]

Notes

1. Caston, this volume and Allen, this volume.

2. Translations from Greek and Latin are the author's own unless otherwise noted.

3. There is considerable dispute about exactly how they were supposed to do this. There have generally been thought to be two major options, "internalist" and "externalist": the guarantee resides either in some subjectively accessible feature of the impression that somehow renders it indubitable, or in the impression's unimpeachable causal history. See Frede 1983, Annas 1990, Hankinson 2003. Also see Caston, this volume.

4. Or perhaps, "straightening out each one"—the manuscript reading, *diorthôsas*, as opposed to Wyttenbach's emendation *diarthrôsas*, accepted by most scholars.

5. The terminology has much in common with Aristotle's in his account of how we come to know the principles of demonstration in *An. post*. II.19; this is surely not accidental.

6. Diogenes claims Chrysippus contradicts himself, since he also said that the cognitive impression was the criterion. But there need be no conflict here. Cognitive impressions are conceptually articulated—more on this in a moment; so, they may very well (in fact, almost always will) incorporate preconceptions. Chrysippus may, then, simply be speaking of different levels at which truth is guaranteed. On their compatibility, see also LS, vol.1: 252–3, and on this topic more generally, see Brittain 2005; see also Powers, this volume and Caston, this volume.

7. I follow the translation of Brittain 2006.

p. 571 8. Or perhaps *On Behalf of Ordinary Experience* (*Huper Sunêtheias*), a proposed emendation to the manuscript text. But even if this is mistaken, we can assume these books were in favor of ordinary experience.

9. Plutarch disagrees, seizing upon the negative arguments as giving the Academics all they could wish for (*Sto. rep.* 1036B–C), and as furnishing him with one more "Stoic self-contradiction." Cicero, speaking from the Academics' perspective, agrees with Plutarch both about Chrysippus's intention (*Acad* 2.75) and about the actual effectiveness of the negative arguments (*Acad*. 2.87).

10. See also Ioppolo 2018: 39 on a separate, methodological attack by Chrysippus against Arcesilaus's practice of arguing against whatever was proposed to him.

11. See Allen, this volume, who discusses both passages.

12. The distinction between these two versions was first made by Striker 1980: 63f. Vogt 2010: 166 introduces a more elaborate taxonomy of *apraxia* charges. But she seems broadly to agree that the two mentioned earlier are the ones most relevant to the Academics.

13. Chrysippus is said to have claimed that god and the wise sometimes induce false impressions in people, with the aim of getting them to act on them, or have an impulse toward them, but not to assent to them—which entails that he thinks action and impulse do *not* require assent (*Sto. rep*. 1057A–B). That Chrysippus may have sanctioned deception for certain purposes, by god or the wise, is quite possible. But the rest is highly dubious—probably either a hostile misreading of what Chrysippus said, or pure speculation on Plutarch's part.

14. Kamtekar, this volume.

15. Allen, this volume.

16. Numenius cites them as contemporaries (in Eusebius, *Praep. evang*. 14.8.10 = *SVF* 3.6), and there are anecdotes that have them dying around the same time (Diogenes Laertius 4.64, Stobaeus 4.52a.19 = *SVF* 3.7). A birth date for Antipater is elusive. But Plutarch reports that on the subject of the ethical end, Antipater developed his position because of pressure from Carneades (*Comm. not.* 1072F), which may imply that Carneades was the older of the two. In any case, several sources report that Antipater went after Carneades at great length, albeit in writing rather than in person (Numenius, in Eusebius, *Praep. evang*. 14.8.10 = *SVF* 3.6; Plutarch, *De garr.* 514D = *SVF* 3.5; Cicero, *Acad*. Fr.1).

17. One thing that we do not know, however—but is frequently cited as one of his best-known pieces of argumentation—is that he argued for and against justice on successive days while on an embassy to Rome in 155 BCE. Powell 2013 makes a strong case that this story is a scholarly concoction. On this event, see Inwood, this volume.

18. Note that these examples would seem to be effective against the Stoics only on the "internalist" reading of their position (cf. note 3); if the self-guaranteeing aspect of cognitive impressions consists instead in their causal history, our ability to tell the difference between these and other false impressions is irrelevant. On the other hand, a criterion is supposed to be a method for distinguishing something; and if this method is not available to the subject at the time—as it would not be on the "externalist" reading—there is a real question whether it is fulfilling its function.

19. Wynne, this volume.

20. *Akatalêpta* might mean "not apprehended" rather than "inapprehensible." But since Sextus contrasts himself with them by saying that he leaves open the possibility that things might be apprehended, "inapprehensible" seems the correct translation here.

21. On what Antipater's intentions may have been, see Burnyeat 1997.

p. 572 22. In the briefer account in Book 1 of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*PH* 1.227–9), Sextus reverses the order of these two higher levels of persuasiveness. I am inclined to think that nothing much turns on this. In practice the two will not be as distinct as Sextus makes them sound; widening the range of impressions consulted is a way of checking on one's first impressions, and checking on an impression will almost inevitably involve comparing it with others. For a detailed interpretation of their interconnected character, see Allen 1994.

23. The Latin is *omnino eum rei nulli adsentiri*. I follow Reid 1885 and Thorsrud 2012 and 2018 (and myself in Bett 1990) in taking *omnino* to modify the verb *adsentiri*—"he does not *entirely* assent"—rather than the noun phrase *rei nulli*, which would give the sense "he assents to *absolutely* nothing" (as LS 69I and Brittain 2006 read it). Since we have just heard that there are two ways of withholding assent, the distinction is naturally understood in terms of *levels* or *degrees* of assent; by contrast, assenting to nothing at all would need to be contrasted with assenting to some things but not others, which is

not how the text continues. It is true that the remainder of the passage uses the term *adsensus* only to refer to the stronger attitude of full-scale assent, which the Academic avoids; but given Carneades's reported opposition to assent (which must mean full-scale assent), that is understandable. There is some awkwardness in the passage however one reads it, and dispute about the details stretches back to Victorian times; see Reid 1885 *ad loc.* versus Hirzel 1883: 168. Regardless of the issue I mentioned, the central idea of an attitude of approval that falls short of full-scale assent (and that Clitomachus sanctions) is not in doubt.

24. Sextus's term for the impressions that pass this test is "unimpeded" (*aperispastos*).

25. I argued for a version of this interpretation in Bett 1989 and Bett 1990. Among other places, it is also advocated in the introduction and notes to Brittain 2006. In changing my mind on this issue, I have been influenced by more recent scholarship, especially Obdrzalek 2006 and the work of Harald Thorsrud, most recently Thorsrud 2012 and Thorsrud 2018. Where I think my earlier work was on the right track was in insisting on the central role of the distinction between assent and approval.

26. Obdrzalek 2006 prefers "probable" on the basis of considerations similar to those I have just outlined.

27. That there was no theory of probability until modern times was an important part of the argument in the influential unpublished paper "Carneades Was No Probabilist" by Myles Burnyeat. For a good case against banishing the notion of probability on that basis, see Obdrzalek 2006: esp. §VII.

28. A related, and perhaps more familiar, way of explicating probability judgments is in terms of the relative amounts one would be willing to bet on certain outcomes.

29. Though one might, if speaking carelessly, call it a kind of assent, and perhaps this is what Sextus, or his source, was doing when using the term "assent" (*sugkatathesis*) at *Math*. 7.188.

30. Schwab, this volume and Sedley, this volume.

31. This picture is well summarized in the introduction to Brittain 2006. An influential paper for this line of interpretation was Frede 1984.

32. Most importantly Sextus, *PH* 1.235. A detailed account of Philo is Brittain 2001; the central points are summarized in the introduction to Brittain 2006. (Brittain distinguishes two stages of Philo's anti-Clitomachean views, but that need not concern us here.) On Philo, see also Lévy 2010, Tarrant 2018.

33. Here I am in general agreement with Obdrzalek 2006: 270–3.

34. And it is worth noting that, at least in Cicero's judgment, this is a matter of context. Cicero makes clear that Carneades only
p. 573 *sometimes* argued in this way (*Acad*. 2.67, cf. 2.59), ↳ suggesting that there may have been other occasions when he deliberately avoided doing so, or even argued for the opposite conclusion.

35. The new translation of Diogenes Laertius (Mensch and Miller 2018) says "forty." This is either a misreading of the Greek, or an unacknowledged alteration of the Greek text. But even 40 would be a lot.

36. The difference may seem so slender as to raise the question why Clitomachus and Philo could have found it important. The answer, I take it, lies in the long history of Academic opposition to assent; how to position oneself in relation to this opposition, and especially whether to break with it, would have been momentous decisions affecting one's self-conception as an Academic.

37. This is the one significant point on which I part ways with the reading of Harald Thorsrud; on this point, see Thorsrud 2010: 77 and Thorsrud 2012: 140. Thorsrud draws inspiration here from Görler 1997: 37–8.

38. So Wynne 2018: 96.

39. Not ironic self-depreciation, as the Loeb translator (H. Rackham) maintains *ad loc*., but ironic self-aggrandizement.

40. Nothing more is known of this Calliphon.

41. Wynne, this volume.

42. Cf. note 24 and accompanying text.

43. The same may not be true of Arcesilaus; see Allen, this volume.

44. Here I am in agreement with Thorsrud 2018: note 24.

45. Cicero also mentions that the Academics conceal their views so that their students will be guided by their own reason rather than by authority (*Acad*. 2.60). This would fit well with the motivation I have just mentioned, but we cannot be sure that it goes back to Carneades himself.

46. So Thorsrud 2018: 52.

47. On this point, I still think the appendix to Bett 1989 is basically correct.

48. I thank Brad Inwood, Susan Sauvé Meyer, and especially James Allen for helpful comments on a previous version, as well as the editors, Nathan Powers and Jacob Klein, for numerous suggested reformulations that made things quite a bit clearer.

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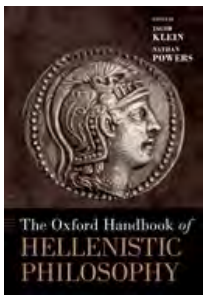
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CHAPTER

25 Platonic Ethics from the Old to the New Academy

J. P. F. Wynne

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Abstract

This chapter presents and interprets evidence about the study of ethics in the ancient Academy from Xenocrates to Carneades. It suggests that while Academics did not share one ethical view, the varied Academic tradition shared two broad continuities in ethics: (1) the outlook that reason can save us from the difficulties we face as rational minds in human bodies, and (2) a history of setting the agenda for other ethicists. In so doing, the chapter offers new precision on Polemo's influence in ethics on both Arcesilaus and Zeno of Citium. The chapter argues that there is new rigor and depth to be found in the "Carneadean division" (*Carneadea divisio*) of views about the highest good.

Keywords: ethics, Academy, Academic, divisio, Carneadean, division, Carneades, Arcesilaus, Polemo, Xenocrates

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1. Introduction

The men and women of the ancient Academy—the school of philosophy founded by Plato—took part in a vigorous and original tradition of research and debate in ethics. In this chapter, my first goal is to survey some of the evidence for that tradition, which dates principally from the "Old Academy" of the generations immediately after Plato to the end of the "New Academy," best known for its turn to what we call epistemological skepticism. As we shall see, Academics did not cleave to the words of their founder or predecessors, still less to established "doctrines." Their views about ethics varied widely. Nevertheless, as my second goal, I shall point out two continuities in this tradition—continuities, indeed, which may do more than any other to hold together what it was to be an "Academic." The first is that Academics loosely shared a distinctive outlook: that the task of ethics is to tell us how to cope with the difficulties we face as compound beings, specifically, as rational souls united with human bodies. The second continuity is that generations of Academics helped to set an agenda for ethical thought that was taken up in philosophy at large and may even color our assumptions today.

Our sources for this story were written at or after the Academy's end, and sometimes much later. They are vexed, in that our authors often wish to give the story a particular moral. Notable is our earliest and most extensive source, Cicero, who considered himself the last follower of the New Academy and had known its last leader, Philo of Larissa. Cicero was also influenced in his history of ethics by Antiochus of Ascalon, who claimed to have left Philo's Academy in order to revive what he called an "Old" Academic tradition with specific ethical doctrines.[1] Antiochus not only argued for his own ethics, but also gave a questionable analysis of Academic, Stoic, and Peripatetic history, in order to claim that his ideas had been shared by many in the authoritative
p. 576 tradition of Plato. Though not an uncritical adherent to Antiochus's views, when Cicero tells us the story ↳ of Academic ethical debate, he is sometimes plainly and indeed explicitly influenced by Antiochus's analysis. There may therefore be tendentious elements in Cicero's own history. Of course, we have many other sources apart from Cicero. Most of these, being from the Greek world, are probably independent of Cicero's writings, so that they allow us to hold him to account. But none of them give as full or lengthy a treatment of our topic, and much of this evidence is from a significantly later date. It is possible that these sources, too, have unusually strong biases.

Necessarily, then, I tell the story of Academic ethics from the perspective of later and interested parties. I approach the evidence in a spirit of optimism and charity, and my own interpretation of Cicero's versions will loom large. Readers should engage their critical acumen.

In §2, I first consider Xenocrates and Polemo, two "Old" Academics whom we would conventionally date just prior to the Hellenistic period covered by this Handbook, but who influenced Hellenistic ethics. In §3, I consider Arcesilaus and the newly "skeptical" Academy. In §4, we look at Carneades, the leading light of the later Academy, and his "division" of philosophical views on the highest good. The final section (§5) turns briefly to the continuities mentioned earlier.

2. The Early Academy

Some of the dialogues that appear in the ancient corpus of Plato's works, such as the *Theages* and *Epinomis*, can usefully illustrate the conditions for ethical debate that prevailed in the early Academy, and they are well worth consideration in their own right. In particular, they prefigure the high regard for reason, and its capacity to reform our lives, that is a unifying feature of Academic ethics.

For reasons of space, however, we here begin with Xenocrates, who took over as head of the Academy on the death of Plato's nephew Speusippus in 339/8 BCE.[2] Not only did Xenocrates study what we would call "ethics,"

but it is likely that, as Aristotle did, he even called this part of philosophy *êthika*, "matters pertaining to character (*êthos*)." For, in the Hellenistic period, philosophy would often be divided into three parts—logic, ethics, and physics—and Xenocrates is the earliest figure to whom this explicit division is attributed.[3] Clement of Alexandria summarizes Xenocrates's view of happiness as follows:

> Xenocrates of Chalcedon asserts that happiness is possession of one's proper virtue (*tês oikeias aretês*) and the ability to serve it (*tês hupêretikês autêi dunameôs*). Next, as to *in* what it comes about, he plainly says the soul; as to *by* what [it is brought about], virtue; as to *out of* what, as parts, [it is composed], fine actions and excellent states and conditions and motions and habits; as to its necessary conditions (*hôn ouk aneu*), bodily and external things.
>
> (*Stromata* 2.22.133.5 = Xenocrates fr. 77 Heinze, fr. 232 Isnarde Parenti)

p. 577 We may assume that Xenocrates (like his contemporaries) thought happiness was the goal of an ethical life.[4] On this basis, note some features of this passage that set the scene for our story. First, although (as we know from elsewhere) Xenocrates held that the human soul is immortal, and indestructible, and separable from the body, note that he attended to the happiness of a *human*, a being composed of a rational soul and a human body.[5] This is by contrast with some passages in Plato where an immortal soul, in the body or not, is the moral subject.[6] Second, Xenocrates's description of human happiness was a conjunction. To be happy, one must *both* have virtue, *and* have something else, whatever is required to serve virtue.[7] But third, the rest of happiness is there to *serve* virtue, *by* which happiness is brought about, *in* the soul. Thus, virtue had an exalted place in Xenocrates's view of human life.

Next we consider Cicero's summary of a position on the *highest good* that he attributes to Xenocrates and Aristotle.[8] Note that, in the context of the Academic theories we discuss in this chapter, at least in principle, the highest good (the subject of Cicero's summary) is not necessarily identical with happiness (the subject of Clement's summary). This is because one happy person may have more goods besides happiness than another. The latter person might be happy without having the *highest* good.

Cicero tells us that Xenocrates said every nature wishes to conserve itself. Human nature he divided between body and soul. He "ranked" the soul "before" the body (*anteponerent*) with boundless praise. He ranked the virtues of the soul before the goods of the body (*De finibus* 4.16). Nevertheless, wisdom is "nature's companion and helpmeet" in looking after the person composed of soul and body, and therefore looks to the needs of both. The goods of the body are said to be obvious. Presumably they include health, beauty, and the like. The goods of the soul need more specification. At least some are virtues, like temperance, justice, and the fine (*honestas*), developed out of innate "seeds" (*semina*). For example, the love of learning is innate (*insitus*) in us, a principle given by nature (*De finibus* 4.18). From this seed, the virtue of wisdom might grow. Innate, too, is the desire to live in a society, a seed from which justice might grow (4.18). Our rational progress will allow us to develop the "art of living" by which we help nature to preserve ourselves (4.16). This is presumably the virtue of soul we are seeking, or a part of it.

Here I will point out two parts of Xenocrates's view of the highest good that distinguish his view from the one developed in later centuries by the Stoics. I do this because these distinctions will help us to understand the "Carneadean division" in §4.

First, even though Xenocrates had the category of things neither good nor bad, he envisages *goods* of the body, and seemingly goods of the soul other than virtue.[9] This was to contrast, famously, with the Stoic theory of value. The Stoics insisted that anything that has no share of virtue is not good.[10]

Second, as we have seen, Xenocrates thought that the love of learning is *innate* (*De finibus* 4.18). Here we recall that Xenocrates would have reckoned with, for example, Plato's *Timaeus*, where we do not *develop* reason as we grow (the Stoic theory), but rather are *born rational* (43a, 69c). If Xenocrates, too, thought that our immortal,

p. 578 rational soul is with us from birth, then he would think that even babies desire truth and knowledge. ↳ Thus, whereas the Stoics think we are driven by non-rational animal concerns until we develop reason, Xenocrates would think the innate "seeds of the virtues" include a natural desire for learning and contemplation, and indeed, perhaps, for the good.[11]

Polemo succeeded Xenocrates as head of the Academy, a position he held for some decades in the late fourth and early third century BCE.[12] Polemo's pupils included many of the most influential philosophers of the early Hellenistic period, among them Zeno of Citium and Arcesilaus. We shall next examine two striking aspects of Polemo's activity in ethics.[13]

First, while objecting to the innovations of the Stoic founder Zeno of Citium, Cicero says that Zeno's "predecessors, among them most explicitly Polemo, had said that the highest good (*summum bonum*) is to live according to nature (*secundum naturam vivere*)" (*De finibus* 4.14). To a scholar of Hellenistic philosophy today, this is a striking historical assertion, because we readily associate the claim that life according to nature is the highest good with the Stoics. There is perhaps some corroboration of Cicero's claim in an independent record that Polemo wrote a work on "life according to nature" (Clement *Stromata* 7.6.32.9).

What did Polemo mean by the phrase? Cicero comments that the Stoics themselves pointed out that Polemo's phrase could mean different things.[14] One meaning was, "to live in harmony with nature (*convenienter naturae vivere*)." This, they said, was what Zeno meant by the phrase, where living in harmony with nature was living by one's knowledge of nature (*De finibus* 4.14). Another meaning was

> to live in enjoyment of all or the greatest of those things that are according to nature. This does not depend on our own actions. For it is composed both from that kind of life which enjoys virtue, and from those things that are according to nature but are not in our power. But the highest good as understood on this … meaning [of "life according to nature"], and the life that is spent with the highest good, falls only to the wise person. This end of goods was established by Xenocrates and by Aristotle, as we see the Stoics themselves have written.
>
> (Cicero *De finibus* 4.15)

Here the following inference is plausible. First, Polemo was known for the explicit use of the phrase "living according to nature," to which the Stoics would later give their own, different meaning. Second, the Stoics thought one way, other than their own, to interpret the phrase was as an expression of Xenocrates's highest good. From these two points, it is plausible to infer that Polemo in fact intended the phrase to express the same highest good as his mentor Xenocrates.

We learn about a second striking aspect of Polemo's activity in ethics from Cicero's comments on an early Stoic claim that "it cannot be right for anyone to boast, unless he has what is fine"—i.e., a virtuous life (*De finibus* 4.50). Cicero says,

> Polemo will grant this to Zeno, as will his teacher [i.e., Xenocrates] and all that tribe [i.e., the
p. 579 Academics] and others who, while they rank virtue far before all else, add ↳ something to it in defining the highest good. For if virtue is worthy of glory, as it is, and is so far superior to other things that the difference can scarcely be stated, and if he who is provided with virtue alone will be able to be happy even if he lacks the rest, [Polemo] will nevertheless not concede *this* to you, that nothing but virtue should be taken to be good.
>
> (*De finibus* 4.51)

Here we learn that Polemo thought not only that virtue is necessary for happiness, but also that it is sufficient for happiness (see also Clement *Stromata* 2.22.133.7). Yet in the previous quotation we learned that he and

Xenocrates thought that some parts of the highest good are not in our power. The answer to this apparent puzzle is in the distinction I have already mentioned, between happiness and the highest good. Virtue is in our power and is sufficient for happiness, but virtue is not sufficient for the highest good. The highest good is a happy life to which goods other than virtue, like health or loved ones, are added.

Perhaps we can understand this position better by considering an anecdote about Polemo that was widely reported in antiquity. The biographical value of such stories is hard to assess, but this one seems to be a sympathetic Academic parable, and we shall interpret it as such. The story is that in his youth Polemo was a wastrel, carrying his money around with him to be able to gratify his urges, even hiding sums of money around Athens so that cash would always be to hand. One day he and his fellow revelers decided to burst into Xenocrates's classroom. Polemo was so taken by Xenocrates's lecture, which was on temperance, that he became an Academic student.[15] So far did philosophy reform his character that Polemo was renowned for his austerity (DL 4.17–19).

We interpret the parable as follows. In the story, Polemo is not merely a habitual wastrel, but far gone in the subterfuges of addiction and vice. Consider what would have happened had such a character turned up in Aristotle's classroom. Aristotle thought there was use in teaching ethics only to well-brought-up young men, because only they would have the necessary habituation (*NE* 1095a2–11). But Polemo was able, through Xenocrates's teaching, to reform himself. Assuming that this captures something in Academic moral psychology, then Polemo and Xenocrates thought that reform of one's reason, through philosophical teaching, could reform one's character in general. The non-rational aspects of the soul must be responsive to reason in a way that Aristotle thought they were not. If reason is in such full command of the soul, somebody with wisdom can control her reactions to adversity, and thus can lose the goods that fortune takes from her without losing her happiness. Exactly how reason exercised total control, our sources do not specify.[16]

Polemo taught Zeno of Citium, the first Stoic, and we have already seen that some of Polemo's ideas invite comparison with Stoic ethics. I will close this section, then, with a review of what Cicero tells us about Polemo's influence on the early Stoa. For even if we do not put too much weight on these reports as biography, they help to clarify the conceptual relations among Zeno and Polemo's ideas.

p. 580 Cicero liked to portray Zeno's philosophical career, what we think of as the "foundation" of the Stoa, as a sort of revolt against Polemo (e.g., *De finibus* 4.3, 4.19, 4.44). In Book 4 of *De finibus*, Cicero uses an argument that Zeno's ethical position was, in the end, no more than verbally different from Polemo's. But Cicero says that Zeno was *initially* attracted to a view that *was* distinct from Polemo's. Let us call this Zeno's "proto-Stoic" view, understanding that it is the "proto-Stoic" view in Cicero's story about Zeno, and not necessarily in Zeno's real biography. Polemo and Xenocrates, as we have seen, said that the highest good was the virtuous life, itself sufficient for happiness, along with the goods of fortune, since when we attend to our whole nature, we see that we benefit from both. Cicero says that Zeno "abandoned nature" (*a natura recessit*) and located the highest good in virtuous life *alone* (*De finibus* 4.54). Thus, from the point of view of the old Academics, Zeno initially adopted a position different from their own, according to which what they called goods other than virtue were not good and not part of the highest good.

Why did Zeno adopt this position? Cicero says that when Stoics like Zeno looked away from our appetites and saw the beauty of virtue, they cast aside everything besides virtue, "having forgotten that the *whole* nature of things for which we have an appetite has so long a range" that we still naturally desire the first goods of body and soul that we desired at the beginning of our moral development, as part of the highest good of the virtuous life, "nor do they understand that they have overthrown the *foundations* of those wonderful and beautiful things," namely the virtues, by which they had been distracted (*De finibus* 4.42).

It helps here to look back at Cicero's summary of Xenocrates's account of moral development (*De finibus* 4.16–18, see §2). For Xenocrates, even the perfectly rational and virtuous person will still regard as goods the goods

of the body and soul which he has naturally desired throughout his development, since his virtue is nature's "helpmeet." Indeed, among these goods are those things, like truth or life in a society, to which he has always been attracted by the "seeds" of the virtues. To dismiss such goods is thus to "overthrow the foundations" of the virtues. Polemo probably took a similar view.

According to Cicero, then, in looking at Polemo's ethical world, Zeno was overwhelmed by the beauty of one aspect of it, rational virtue, and fell in love with that. Although Cicero is acerbic about this in Book 4 of *De finibus*, he would have some sympathy. He mentions elsewhere how beautiful and alluring virtue would be if we could see it (*De officiis* 1.15, cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 250d). This led Zeno, at first, to forget that a life according to nature requires us to attend to our *whole* nature, body and soul, which does not change when we become wise. Cicero says that it was only later, when he realized his mistake, that Zeno saw he must make room for valuable things other than virtue, and thus produced a theory worded to sound different from Academic ethics, but not really so different.[17] But we should emphasize here that it was Academics like Cicero who suspected Zeno of this later subterfuge. Stoics would say that Zeno consistently held both what I have called the "proto-Stoic" ethics in Cicero's story and that some things not good or bad have value.

Cicero's quietly sympathetic account of Zeno's proto-Stoic revolt helps us to see the point of old Academic
p. 581 ethics. Xenocrates and Polemo held virtue of the soul, and ↳ therefore perfection of *reason*, in ineffably high esteem, because they took nature as their guide and thought that reason is the pinnacle of our nature. But they nevertheless concentrated their ethics on the *whole* of human nature.

3. Arcesilaus

In the generation after Polemo, Arcesilaus, who was head of the Academy for roughly the second quarter of the third century BCE, turned Academic thought in a new direction. Today we would describe this new direction as *epistemological skepticism*.[18] That is, it was part of the family of philosophical stances dependent on arguments that nothing can be known. In part thanks to his arguments that nothing can be known, Arcesilaus was known in antiquity as an advocate of universal *epokhê* or "suspension of judgment," the view that one ought not to assent dogmatically to any belief whatsoever. The second famous exponent of this "New" Academic skepticism was Carneades, who was head of the Academy in the middle of the second century BCE. What Arcesilaus's and Carneades's versions of skepticism were, and in what sense they advocated a view that seems to suggest that one should not advocate any view, are difficult and substantial questions.[19] Here and in §4 we examine Arcesilaus and Carneades in relation to ethics.

In what follows, I shall assume the plausible and well-attested interpretation that Arcesilaus did, in some sense, advocate and follow a principle of suspension of judgment (Sextus Empiricus *PH* 1.232–4, Cicero *Academica* 1.45, DL 4.28, 4.36). There is one important puzzle raised by this assumption on which Academic ethics can, perhaps, shed light.

The puzzle is this. Arcesilaus's most famous argument in favor of universal suspension of judgment is an argument against the Stoics, which for the most part borrows Stoic premises (Sextus Empiricus *M* 7.157, Cicero *Academica* 2.67–8). The Stoics believed in "cognitive impressions" (*katalêptikai phantasiai*), impressions of sensation or thought so clear and distinct that they are true and cannot be false.[20] They said their sage would assent to—that is, take to be true—only these. For, they said, since any other impression might be false, to assent to any impression that is not cognitive is to form a *mere* opinion. For his part, Arcesilaus argued that there are *no* cognitive impressions. Accordingly, since the Stoics said their sage assents only to cognitive impressions, he said that the Stoics must conclude that their sage would *never* assent. Now, the Stoics considered their sage to be an ideal figure. They wished to become sages and thought one ought to do as the sage would do. The clear point of Arcesilaus's argument, then, is to say to the Stoics that *by their own lights* their long path to knowledge, which requires assent, is to be avoided. In its place, he offers them a surprising but

immediate leap into wisdom, or at least into doing as the sage would do: universal suspension of judgment. The puzzle is why *Arcesilaus*, who was not a Stoic, would feel the force of this argument, or of arguments like it
p. 582 against other dogmatic schools. If he felt that his skeptical arguments ↳ against the possibility of cognitive impressions implied that one *ought* always to suspend judgment, to what did he owe his "ought"?

Arcesilaus "who had been Polemo's student, took from Plato's various books and from the conversations of Socrates that there is nothing certain which can be grasped either by the senses or by the soul" (Cicero *De oratore* 3.67). Arcesilaus thus shared with Zeno, the first Stoic, an education with Polemo. Zeno's world is an epistemic Eden, where the truth about the bodies around us presses itself into our grasp through cognitive impressions and can in principle be known with certainty. Against Zeno Arcesilaus argued that there was no such basis for certain knowledge (*epistêmê*), or indeed for responsible assent at all. He argued similarly against all other routes to knowledge so that Arcesilaus found that the practice of rational argument left him knowing nothing, as he thought it had left Socrates before him. But suppose that Arcesilaus, like Zeno and his Academic teachers, had been formed by his training in Academic ethics to *value* above all his reason and its quest for truth and knowledge—the quest that he now found frustrated. He reacted, perhaps, with the urge to protect the integrity of his reason and its quest from the temptations of Zeno's specious Eden, or any other proposal for the pursuit of knowledge that could in fact lead him into unwarranted belief.[21]

Now, such an interpretation raises its own puzzles. Did Arcesilaus react in this way because, perhaps contrary to his own strictures, he formed the *opinion* that one ought to protect one's reason from unwarranted beliefs? Perhaps so, but we could suppose, I think, that Arcesilaus took himself to react as he did without forming any opinions at all. To be strongly motivated by (as we might say today) the *intuition* that one's reason ought to be held sacrosanct, even by such an intuition formed by one's philosophical training, perhaps one need not judge that it is *true* that one's reason ought to be held sacrosanct.[22]

We also know that Arcesilaus contended with an ethical problem for a follower of universal suspension of judgment. The problem was that happiness, the goal of life, depends on a criterion on which to act (Sextus Empiricus *M* 7.158). Presumably, this problem was pressed against him by Stoics or other dogmatic opponents (cf. Cicero *Academica* 2.39). Arcesilaus, by responding to it, at least acknowledged the force of the view that a good life requires a criterion by which to make rational choices. But if we do not have certain access to truth in the way that Zeno maintained, what other persuasive account of this practical criterion could there be? Sextus Empiricus tells us that Arcesilaus argued in reply that one who suspends judgment on all questions will choose her actions according to what is reasonable (*eulogos*).

> Through practical wisdom (*phronesis*), happiness results. But practical wisdom lies in right actions, and a right action (*katorthôma*) is that which, once done, has a reasonable defence (*eulogon apologian*). Therefore, the one who attends to what is reasonable will act rightly and be happy.
>
> (Sextus Empiricus *M* 7.158)

Once again, this argument is plainly to designed to appeal to the Stoics, perhaps among other dogmatists. For
p. 583 the Stoics, actions having a reasonable defense are called ↳ *kathêkonta*—appropriate or incumbent actions—and even fools may do them. Such actions become right actions (*katorthômata*) and components of happiness only when they are also performed on the basis of the certain knowledge (*epistêmê*) that belongs to the sage.[23] Arcesilaus replies to the Stoics with a picture of the good life where a wise person's right actions are right not because they are done knowledgeably, but rather because, like the Stoics' merely appropriate actions, they have a *reasonable* defense. Moreover, Arcesilaus said this life is available not only to someone who lacks knowledge, but even to someone who suspends judgment on all matters, meaning, at least as I have interpreted him, someone who does not take anything to be true. She could live this way, because she could identify claims that she takes to be reasonable without taking them to be true. That we sometimes find claims reasonable without taking them to be true is, for example, vividly apparent from the fact that we sometimes find them to be both

reasonable and false. Reason, after all, pursues and hopes for truth, but in pursuit of truth it is attracted to propositions and actions by qualities other than truth. To give some examples, we sometimes find things reasonable when we find them plausible, coherent with one another and with how things seem, satisfying in their implications, pragmatically useful, and so on, even when we do not take them to be true.[24]

Arcesilaus probably made this argument in order to dispose of the problem that the Stoics had posed against him, rather than to propose his "own" ethics. Nevertheless, we can once again see how this sort of argument might have seemed a weighty one to somebody with Academic habits of mind, and might have helped to lead Arcesilaus into suspension of judgment. Polemo, who said that virtue is sufficient for happiness, could certainly agree that "through practical wisdom, happiness results." Similarly, reasonability as an alternative to truth seems designed to appeal to Academics, who held the life of reason in high esteem. What is "reasonable" or *eulogon*, literally "well-reasoned," could give one a criterion by which, at least for now, to live a life *of reason* without access to the truth.

4. Carneades

Carneades led the Academy in the middle of the second century BCE. Like Arcesilaus, he wrote no books and, rather than developing his own ethics, engaged in discussion of the views of others. In this section we examine perhaps his most significant contribution to ethical debate, the so-called Carneadean division (*Carneadea divisio*). A "division" in this context is a classification of philosophical views—whether views that various philosophers have actually held, or views that philosophers could hold—about some question.[25] The term "Carneadean division" is sometimes applied to each member of a family of similar but not identical classifications of philosophical views about the highest good, or end, or goal of human life that appear in Cicero's works. Such classifications of views under discussion are a natural thing for any philosopher to
p. 584 produce. For example, there is evidence that the Stoic leader Chrysippus, to whom Carneades often responded,
↳ made similar classifications. The various ethical "divisions" in Cicero are each used for its own argumentative context, and Cicero or his sources may have formulated each division for its own purpose. There is no reason to suppose that the whole family of such classifications are owed to Carneades.[26]

We shall make the best use of the space in this chapter by concentrating on Cicero *De finibus* 5.16–23, the passage that is the source of the term *Carneadea divisio*—and is the only place where such a classification is attributed to Carneades by name. Consideration of this text alone will be sufficient to illustrate why Carneades's division proved stimulating, both to later ancient ethicists and to modern scholars of ancient ethics. We know that the division was influential on Antiochus of Ascalon. Indeed, the speaker in Cicero's passage describing the division is Piso, whose task is to make attractive Antiochus's teaching. Antiochus, says Piso, uses the Carneadean division. Thus, it is possible that Antiochus is the source for some aspects of this version of the division. But here we assume that Cicero faithfully reports Carneades in this passage.

Note first that the division is specifically a division of views on the *highest good* (*summum bonum*) rather than views on, for example, *happiness*. This is clear because some thinkers whose views are included, for example Polemo, distinguished happiness from the highest good (see §2).

Carneades, says Piso, saw "not only how many were the views of philosophers on the highest good down to his time, he also saw how many there even *could* be" (Cicero *De finibus* 5.16). This means that Carneades's classification is remarkably ambitious. It seeks to classify every *possible* philosophical view about the highest good. Now, at first sight, it will be implausible that this is a classification of every possible view. It is easy to think of views that philosophers, or people regarded as philosophers, *could* defend that do not (or do not obviously) appear in Carneades's classification, for example that the highest good is God, or the greatest happiness for the greatest number. But I suggest that Carneades's claim is based on a substantial conception of what counts as *philosophy*. He classifies not all the possible views about the highest good that anybody who

calls himself a philosopher might hold, but rather all the possible views of those who are (for Carneades's purposes in this argument) truly *philosophers*. So far as we know, all the actual philosophers whom Carneades includes in the classification are in the Socratic tradition—e.g., Aristippus of Cyrene, Peripatetics, Academics, or Stoics. (Epicureans and other non-Socratic thinkers presumably fail to meet the substantial criteria for philosophy.)

Carneades *argues* that all possible philosophical views about the highest good must fit into his classification. I suggest that the premises of this argument function as criteria for who is truly a philosopher. To be a philosopher, Carneades implies, you must accept these premises. Together the premises will yield *two disagreements* about the highest good, from which Carneades generates his *divisio*.

We can summarize the early part of the argument as follows (Cicero *De finibus* 5.16):

(1) No *art* ever takes its start from itself, rather, there is something outside itself with which it is concerned.

p. 585 (2) ↳ Practical wisdom (*prudentia*) is the *art* of living.

(3) Therefore, necessarily practical wisdom needs something outside itself from which to take its start.

These are three substantial claims, quickly narrowing the range of possible views that will follow from them. First, to accept (2), one must accept that there is an *art* of living, namely practical wisdom. It is hardly obvious that that is the case, but we can see that such a claim would attract the consensus at least of the Academic tradition with its rational art of wisdom.

Everyone agrees, says Carneades, that (again, paraphrasing Cicero *De Finibus* 5.17):

> (4) The thing outside itself with which the art of living is concerned, as required by (1) and (3), should be (*oportere*) the "first natural objects of desire" (*prima invitamenta naturae*), whatever is "fitted and appropriate to nature" (*aptum et accomodatum naturae*) such that it attracts the soul's appetite (*appetitus*, Greek *hormê*).
>
> (Cicero *De finibus* 5.17)

That is to say, since this is an art of *living*, or of *acting*, it is concerned with things that *move* us to act by inciting our desires. Carneades claims that what moves us *should be* what *naturally* moves us. Now, one way to understand "what naturally moves us" would be those things which, as a matter of human nature, do in fact move us. On this understanding, nothing could move us contrary to nature. But when Carneades says that the first natural objects of desire *should* move us, this suggests that they might not. So, assuming that something must attract us, Carneades seems to mean that some things could attract us unnaturally, perhaps because our culture or our own thinking can lead us into unnatural desires. On this understanding, Carneades's claim is that philosophers agree that we *ought* to pursue the first things that naturally attract us, even if we *can* pursue other things. Thus, again, premise (4) seems a controversial claim, rather than something with which everyone agrees. Some thinkers might well object that our natural motivations lead us into, say, selfishness or violence, and that we *ought* to try to transcend them if we can. But Carneades excludes these objections from his division. Once again, we can see how at least the Academic part of the Socratic tradition would license him to do this. Reason, said Xenocrates, is nature's helpmeet (see §2).

Here we have arrived at the *first disagreement* in the classification of the highest good. It will not be a disagreement about value, but rather a question about human psychology: what is or are the "first natural objects of desire"?

The three parties to this first disagreement are (a) those who think the first natural object of desire is *pleasure*, (b) those who think it is *absence of pain*, (c) those who think the first natural objects of desire are "the first

things according to nature (*prima secundum naturam*)" (Cicero *De finibus* 5.18). We should pause to avoid an impending confusion, caused by Piso's use of two confusingly similar phrases. Note, then, that the first natural
p. 586 objects of desire and the first things according to nature are at least conceptually distinct. One view that Carneades discusses, (c), is that the first natural objects of desire *are* ↳ the first things according to nature. But the other two views, (a) and (b), imply that first natural objects of desire are *not* the first things according to nature. Thus, in Carneades's division, the first natural objects of desire and the first things according to nature are at least distinct concepts.

What, then, are these two concepts? First, what is it to be a first natural object of desire? Consider a baby reaching for her bottle. Something attracts her. What? As the baby drinks, she will feel pleasure, she will free herself of hunger, and she will gain food. If you think the first natural object of desire is pleasure, you will conclude that she is attracted to the *pleasure* of drinking. If you think the first natural object of desire is absence of pain, you will conclude that she wishes to *shed the pain* of hunger. If you think the first natural objects of desire are the first things according to nature, you will conclude that she desires *food*. In other words, the first natural objects of desire are whatever primarily naturally move the human animal. What many of these objects are might be made clear in the behavior of an infant, since she will have had little time to develop unnatural desires and thus will still be moved by her natural desires.[27]

Second, what is it to be a first thing according to nature? In my example just given, food is a first thing according to nature. Food is something that helps to preserve the baby's nature, nourishing her and keeping her alive. Piso gives his own list of examples on behalf of Carneades:

> Among [the first things according to nature] they number soundness and preservation of all the parts, health, whole senses, lack of pain, strength, beauty, and other things of this kind, to which are similar the first things of the soul, as though the sparks and seeds of virtue.
>
> (Cicero *De finibus* 5.18)

One way to sum up the list is to say that these are all things that preserve our nature when we have them, or which it damages our nature to lack. We might capture in the following way the point of arguing that such things, rather than pleasure or the absence of pain, are the first natural objects of desire. We do not primarily naturally desire the nice feelings that often result when we have something that preserves our nature, or to avoid the nasty feelings that often result when we lack it. Rather, we primarily naturally desire *the thing* that preserves our nature. A small child, who is learning to walk, falls painfully every time he tries. Nevertheless, he keeps trying. This would be hard to explain if the object of his desire was pleasure or the absence of pain. Partisans of the first things according to nature as the first natural objects of desire would say, what he desires is to walk, because that preserves his nature.

Now, one version of the concept of first things according to nature is very familiar to readers used to reading about Stoicism. It is easy to see how Carneades could say that for the Stoics "the first things according to nature" are indeed the first natural objects of our desire, including many of the things that Piso mentions, like health or beauty (LS 58 and 59, esp. 58C). For, these are objects which, according to the Stoics, are in themselves
p. 587 indifferent, neither bad nor good, because they have no share of virtue or vice, which ↳ alone for the Stoics are good or bad. Nevertheless, their naturalness gives them some "value," and a wise person will generally select them as objects of her actions because they are natural. Because this way of thinking about what Carneades calls the first things according to nature is so familiar, it is tempting for those who know about Stoicism to suppose that the category of the first things according to nature in Carneades's division is intended to capture specifically the Stoic view about first natural objects of desire.[28] But that is manifestly not so. Piso says that, besides the Stoics, the old Academics, the Peripatetics, and Carneades himself for the sake of argument, also hold that the first things according to nature are the first natural objects of desire. But these philosophers

disagreed with the Stoics about human nature. Different views about human nature will yield different views about the things that preserve human nature.

For example, we have seen that Xenocrates included the concerns of the "seeds" of the virtues among our first natural objects of desire. For example, he included *truth*, object of the love of learning, a love he thought was innate and a seed of virtue.[29] From this it follows that he included truth, which does not occur in Stoic lists of preferred indifferents, among the first things according to nature. Thus, Xenocrates disagrees with the Stoics about what the first things according to nature *are*. Furthermore, the older Academics (among others) disagreed with the Stoics about the *value* of the first things according to nature. The Stoics said that they were indifferent, the Academics that they were good.[30] In sum, in Carneades's classification, philosophers may agree that the first things according to nature are the first natural objects of desire, but may disagree about what the first things according to nature *are*. One consequence of this point is that, in principle, the classification is more capacious than it might appear. Any philosopher who can agree with Carneades's premises, and who holds that the first things according to nature are the first natural objects of desire, has a place in the bottom row of Table 25.1. But this philosopher can put into the basket of first things according to nature whatever her view of human nature suggests.

Now we move to the *second disagreement*. As we have seen, a premise of Carneades's division is that somebody who acquires practical wisdom, the art of living, establishes by reason what the first natural objects of desire might be (*quo primum natura moveatur*, "by what nature is first moved"), and that the art of living is concerned with obtaining such objects. This second disagreement is about *the role of practical wisdom* in relation to the highest good. It is, again, a disagreement among three views.

One view is that (i) the highest good is the first natural object, or objects, of desire. According to this view, every right action (*officium*) must be in pursuit of the first natural object, or objects, of desire (*De finibus* 5.19–20). The role of practical wisdom in a good life is only to acquire the *highest* good. Take, for example, the hedonism of Aristippus of Cyrene. According to Carneades, Aristippus holds that the first natural object of desire is the highest good, and that pleasure is the first natural object of desire. Thus, he holds that pleasure is the highest good. The role of practical wisdom in a good life, then, would be to identify and acquire pleasure.

Unlike this first view, the second and third views share a "theory of the right, and indeed of the fine (*recti … ratio*
p. 588 *atque honesti*)" (Cicero, *De finibus* 5.19). This theory holds ↳ that it is "fine" to do everything for the sake of the first natural object or objects of desire, even if one does not obtain that object or objects.[31] This point of this theory, then, is that to act out of practical wisdom is itself, or is part of, the highest good. For, if I do everything for the sake of the first natural objects of desire, that shows that I have acquired the practical wisdom that identifies and pursues these objects. The theory holds that simply to act out of practical wisdom, that is to say, out of the art of living, rational virtue, is itself fine, even if ill luck means that I do not obtain the object of my action. For example, suppose that I go out wisely for some groceries which (let us suppose) are first natural objects of desire, but an accident has closed the supermarket and I do not get my food. The theory of the fine holds that my trip out was a fine action. "The fine" (*honestum*) is in Cicero's writing a term for a kind of good, the equivalent of what in Greek philosophy is called *to kalon*. It is a good that offers the kind of honor or beauty we see in virtue or in perfected reason (see, e.g., Cicero, *De officiis* 1.15). It is this kind of goodness, rather than the acquisition of the first natural objects of desire, that the theory of the fine attributes to wise actions.

The second view of the second disagreement is that (ii) the highest good is both the fine and the first natural object, or objects, of desire. That is to say, the highest good is both to pursue the first natural objects of desire, and in fact to obtain them. In Polemo's terms, the *highest* good is to be happy—to live according to practical wisdom—and also to have the goods of fortune, the first things according to nature. Note that Carneades's description of this view can accommodate substantially different theories. For example, it could accommodate either the view that virtue alone is sufficient for happiness but not for the highest good, or the view that

happiness and the highest good are identical, which here would imply that virtue alone is not sufficient for happiness.

The third view on the second disagreement is that (iii) the fine alone is the highest good. This is the Stoic view, that only what is virtuous is good, since goodness is found *only* in the fine, in perfected reason and its actions. The first things according to nature, our first natural objects of desire, are merely indifferent, neither good nor bad. They do not add to or subtract from the good.

We can now tabulate all the possible views on the highest good classified by Carneades's *divisio* in Table 25.1. The first of the two disagreements we have just discussed is represented by the vertical axis on the left, and the second disagreement is represented by the horizontal axis at the top. In the table I include the thinkers that Piso names as holding some of the views in the classification. Since it is a classification of all *possible* views, it is not surprising that some views (represented in the table by empty cells) were not actually defended.

Table 25.1 The "Carneadean Division," Cicero *De finibus* 5.16–23.

		The highest good is …		
		… only the first natural object(s) of desire.	… the fine (*honestum*) and the first natural object(s) of desire.	… only the fine.
The first natural object(s) of desire is/are …	… pleasure.	Aristippus	Callipho and Dinomachus[a]	
	… absence of pain.	Hieronymus[a]	Diodorus[a]	
	… the first things according to nature.	Carneades (for the sake of argument)	The ancients, e.g., Academics and Peripatetics	Stoics

Explicitly excluded from classification: Pyrrho, Aristo, Herillus.[b]

[a]We know very little about Hieronymus, Callipho, Dinomachus, and Diodorus beyond what is recorded in the various iterations of the *divisio* in Cicero (see note 26). Hieronymus and Diodorus were Peripatetics (*De finibus* 5.14). Presumably Carneades names such obscure philosophers because there were, within the Socratic tradition of philosophy to which the division appears to be confined, no better-known representatives of their unusual views about the highest good.

[b]The exclusion of these three illustrates the limits of what Carneades, for the purposes of the *divisio*, considers to be real philosophy. Herillus, who thought that knowledge is the highest good (*De finibus* 5.73), would reject the whole sequence of thought about the art of living and the first natural objects of desire. Pyrrho thought we should have no appetites, frustrating our first natural objects of desire (*De finibus* 4.43). Aristo said that the wise man's appetites are brought about by "whatever occurs to him" rather than what is natural (*De finibus* 4.43, cf. 4.69–70). See Lévy 1980, Annas 2007: 192–3. Carneades also excludes Democritus (5.23). But the grounds for exclusion of Democritus differ in character from those by which Pyrrho, Aristo, and Herillus are excluded. What Democritus calls tranquility of soul (*euthumia*)—which might sound like a view of *the highest good* (i.e., that from which the happy life flows and the topic of Carneades's division)—is, in fact, (says Piso) a view about *the happy life* itself, which is not the topic of the division.

Why did Carneades offer this classification? We have no explicit information on the point. But it is easy to imagine its uses for an Academic skeptic. Suppose, for example, that Carneades could give arguments against any of the views in the table that held any attraction for his audience. Suppose also that audience accepted his argument that these are all the possible philosophical views on the highest good. Then the audience would think that Carneades had argued not only against any actual position that had been defended, but even against any *possible* attractive position on the highest good. Their ↳

suspension of judgment would have a totality that it would lack if they thought another position could emerge. Alternatively, by displaying all the possible views on the highest good and arguing that many of them were as strong as each other, he could make his audience disinclined to accept any one of them. It was presumably in support of some such strategy that Carneades pioneered the defense of the view in the bottom left of Table 25.1.[32] Perhaps, too, this defense made the Stoics, Peripatetics, and older Academics look hasty and fanciful. Why did they propose the theory of the fine, when there was a good argument, first given by Carneades, that their "first things according to nature" alone might be a satisfactory candidate for the highest good? But we do not know how Carneades's argument went.

Why did Antiochus pick up the division? To an audience in the Socratic tradition, it is plausible that *exactly one* of the views in the table is true. Piso, on behalf of Antiochus, argues quickly that all the views but those of the Stoics and old Academics are wrong. Then, he argues not that either of these views is wrong, but rather that they are the same view—erasing, so to speak, the line between the Stoic and Academic cells in Table 25.1—and that this view is the same as his own.[33] Thus, there is only one possibly true view in the table, namely Antiochus's. Since exactly one view must be true, Antiochus's view must be true.

There is a beauty to Carneades's division. Philosophers often speak of "mapping" logical or philosophical "space." The division is a rigorous attempt to map the "space" of ideas about the highest good for human beings in the Socratic tradition, and to define its limits. Whatever its origins, the division succeeded in setting an ethical agenda for influential figures in first century BCE philosophy like Antiochus. Through Antiochus's follower Varro, Antiochus's version reached Augustine, and helped to shape his reflections on the highest good.[34]

5. The Academic Tradition in Ethics

I conclude by observing two continuities in the Academic tradition in ethics.

First, as we have seen, the Academics held human *reason* in very high esteem, seeing the perfection of our reason, wisdom, as key to our happiness. This they shared with the Socratic tradition of philosophy at large. The old Academics in particular seem to think that reason can reform the whole soul, even its non-rational or emotional character. Polemo thought that the virtue of such reason is alone sufficient for happiness, even if our highest good would include additional goods of fortune. Moreover, it seemed to the old Academics that a good human life, the life of reason, must be seen as the life of a *whole human*, a compound of a soul, rational and otherwise, with a body, complex and vulnerable as we are. Thus, they included feelings and bodily goods in their account of the good life. The Academic skeptics, for their part, saw an equally plausible and desirable alternative in a vision of human reason capable of the austerity of universal suspension of judgment, sustained by dialectic and argument.

Second, as I have emphasized, this optimistic vision of reason and its power to make us better, inherited in different ways from Socrates and Plato, helped to set an agenda in ethics that reached beyond the Academy itself. This is evident, first, in Polemo's influence both on Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, and on Arcesilaus, who turned the Academy toward suspension of judgment. But it is apparent as well in the eventual wide influence of Carneades, whose *divisio*, adopted and deployed by Antiochus, provided a powerful framework for ethical theorizing that persisted into late antiquity. It is easy to imagine that it beckoned to each new thinker on ethics who encountered it: where do *I* fit into this division—or do I break its boundaries? Thanks largely to its prominence in Cicero, the *divisio* was also absorbed into later Latin traditions of ethical writing. Some of those traditions, developed in the medieval and modern periods, are still with us today.

Notes

1. Sedley, this volume.

2. Xenocrates's fragments are collected in Isnardi Parente 2012, revised by Dorandi, and in Heinze 1892 (reprinted in 1965). For the evidence on Speusippus's own ethics, see Tarán 1981: 78–85 with the relevant fragments he collects, and Dillon 2003: 64–77.

3. Sextus Empiricus *M.* 7.16, cf. Cicero *De finibus* 4.4.

4. Among Xenocrates's many writings on ethics was a treatise in two books *On happiness* (DL 4.12). As Dillon 2003: 141, note 149 points out, Clement in our passage may summarize material stemming, at least in part, from that treatise.

5. Xenocrates, fragments 209–12 Isnarde Parenti, 73–5 Heinze.

6. Examples include *Phaedo* 107c–d, *Republic* 621b–d.

7. That he thought something other than virtue necessary for happiness might suggest that Xenocrates (unlike Polemo) denied that virtue alone was sufficient for happiness. Perhaps he did. But perhaps he thought that virtue was a sufficient condition for whatever we need to be able serve it—life, for example, or the possession of reason. If so, then virtue would be sufficient for happiness on his view.

8. This passage requires the greatest caution. The imprecision (at best) with which it captures what we know about Aristotle's ethics ought to lead us to ask how precisely it characterizes Xenocrates—although one might use the same evidence to argue that Xenocrates, not Aristotle, must be the main target of the passage. Again, the passage makes Xenocrates sound a lot like Antiochus as described by Piso in Book 5 of *De finibus* (cf. also the explicitly Antiochean synthesis of early Academic and Peripatetic ethics at Cicero's *Academica* 1.19–23). This raises the suspicion that Cicero wrote it under the influence of Antiochus. However, unlike Piso in Book 5, Cicero in Book 4 does not attribute his claims to Antiochus. It seems to me possible that this argument is inspired more by Carneades (cf. Schofield 2012), whether through Clitomachus's writings or the word of mouth tradition, than by Antiochus, or that it is Cicero's own interpretation of Xenocrates. Carneades and Cicero agreed neither with Xenocrates nor with Xenocrates's opponents. Thus, they might be more reliable sources than Antiochus, since Antiochus hoped to prove that Xenocrates was in his own, controversial camp. I share with Dillon 2003 this hopeful attitude about the passage as a source for Xenocrates. Book 4 and its place in *De finibus* can be hard to parse. Bénatouïl 2016 is very helpful in this regard. Cf. also Lévy 1984.

p. 592 9. On indifferents in Xenocrates, see Sextus Empiricus *M.* 11.4 = Xenocrates fr. 231 Isnarde Parenti.

10. Klein, this volume.

11. Of course, the Stoics could not deny that in some sense even infants love to learn. But those who are too young to have reason cannot yet have a *rational* desire for truth. For the Stoics, their desire to learn must be a prompting toward *becoming* rational. Cicero's Stoic Cato in *De finibus* says that in *parvi* ("little children") we see a disinterested delight "if they discover something by themselves using reason (*ratione*)" (3.17). Thus, the children Cato has in mind are evidently not so little as to lack reason.

12. Polemo's fragments are collected in Gigante 1977.

13. Today Polemo is conventionally said to be "[p]rimarily a moralist, [who] dismissed the purely theoretical side of philosophy as sterile" (*Oxford Classical Dictionary* 4th edition s.v. "Polemo"; cf. Sedley 1999: 146 and Dillon 2003: 160). If so, he would be of still greater interest in this chapter. But I think a more plausible interpretation of the text thought to support this view of Polemo (DL 4.18) is that he recommended that philosophers should exercise themselves (*gumnazesthai*) in the *facts* (*pragmasi*) and not in *theorems of logic* (*dialektikois theôrêmasi*). Else, he warns, they will end up skilled at winning debates, but not at discovering their own nature. Note that to advise against *exercises* in the theory of logic is not to advise against *learning* such theory in the first place, nor against *using* logic when exercising oneself in the facts or when seeking the truth.

14. Some readers think that the three interpretations of "to live according to nature" at *De finibus* 4.14–16, of which I have mentioned two, are *all* supposed to be *Stoic* interpretations of the phrase (see Annas at Annas and Woolf 2001, 95, note 15, Dillon 2003: 137). Certainly there is no reason that the Stoics should not have interpreted Zeno's use of the phrase in

different ways, or simply disagreed with one another about the highest good. But the two interpretations of *secundum naturam vivere* other than Zeno's seem impossible to square with any kind of Stoicism we know about. Therefore, I think the Stoics pointed to these two as interpretations of *Polemo*'s phrase which do *not* capture the Stoic highest good. The Stoics' point, presumably, was distinguish what *they* meant by "life according to nature" (namely, what Zeno meant) from what others, like Xenocrates or Aristotle, would understand by the phrase that Polemo coined. Perhaps the Stoics made this distinction in the face of arguments that Zeno's position was really no different from Xenocrates's.

15. The two main sources for the story are DL 4.16 and Philodemus's life of Polemo, *Academica* 4.40–13.10. Philodemus attributes it to Antigonus of Carystus. For some other sources, see Jakobi 2011. Some theories about the ethical significance of relationships between master and student in Xenocrates and Polemo's Academies, and their relation to some texts in the Platonic corpus, are explored in Tarrant 2005 and 2007, and Lampe 2013.

16. We know that at least some older Academics favored moderate emotion rather than the lack of emotion advocated by the Stoics; see Dillon 2003: 224–30. A late ancient commentator indeed tells us that Xenocrates thought that even the non-rational aspect of the soul is immortal, which implies that Xenocrates believed in a non-rational aspect to the soul (Damascius, *Commentary on the Phaedo*, 1.177 = Xenocrates fr. 75 Heinze, fr. 211 Isnardi Parente). This suggests that some of the non-rational aspects of our life, including the passions, are natural and permanent aspects of our souls. Since Xenocrates pursued what is natural, it would follow that emotional life in general is to be welcomed rather than merely dealt with. The early third century Academic, Crantor, author of a famous consolation against grief, certainly welcomed suitably moderate emotions (see Graver 2002: ↳ Appendix A). On the other hand, the Polemo story, alongside Crantor's
p. 593 calls for moderate emotions, suggests that Academics thought that we can substantially moderate our emotional reactions by reforming our reason, rather than by habituation alone, as Aristotle thought.

17. Bénatouïl 2016 explores further *De finibus* Book 4's depiction of Zeno's position.

18. In antiquity, Pyrrhonians such as Sextus Empiricus used the term *skeptikoi* to characterize those who adopted their own outlook. Generally, they did not apply this term to Academics, and Academics did not apply it to themselves. On the relationship between the Academics and Pyrrhonians, see Schwab, this volume.

19. Allen, this volume and Bett, this volume.

20. Caston, this volume.

21. Cicero gives a similar interpretation of Arcesilaus's motivations at *Academica* 1.45, observing that, for Arcesilaus, nothing was "more vicious" (*turpius*, an ethical term) than for assent to "outrun" (*praecurrere*) cognitive evidence. But in the same passage Cicero says that Arcesilaus *judged* (*censebat*) this to be so, which implies that Arcesilaus was more rationally committed to this view than I say was required. But see also *Academica* 2.66–7.

22. For some alternative accounts of Arcesilaus's motivations, see Sedley 1983, Cooper 2004, Brittain 2008. Meanwhile, the last head of the Academy, Philo of Larissa, put forward his own ethical views, in keeping with his "mitigated" skeptical position. See Brittain 2001: 255–95.

23. Tsouni, this volume.

24. For some alternative views of Arcesilaus's appeal to the "reasonable," see Allen, this volume and Ioppolo 2018: 44–6.

25. How could a philosopher who wrote no books have given and passed down a complex and subtle classification like the *divisio*? We are told Carneades's arguments were transmitted in writing by others, notably by his student Clitomachus, who was a prolific and painstaking author (DL 4.67, Cicero, *Orator* 51, Sextus Empiricus *M.* 9.1). As to its complexity, the division lends itself to visual representation. So, we could speculate that Carneades used a visual aid of some kind in his lectures.

26. Some variations or other uses of the "Carneadean" division in Cicero are at *De finibus* 5.16–23, 5.75, 5.85–7, 4.50, 3.30–1, 2.19, 2.34–5; *Tusculans* 5.82–5; *Academica* 2.131, 2.139; *De officiis* 3.119. Algra 1997 shows that these various uses are tailored to their argumentative context. Cf. Annas 2007, Lévy 1992: 354–418.

27. In the context of the first natural attractions, and the first things according to nature, what does "first" mean? When we ask what the natural desires of the human animal are, free from unnatural development or cultural influence, it is helpful, as we have just done, to consider the motivations of a newborn. Parties to the debate in Hellenistic ethics did the same (see Brunschwig 1986). Many first objects are therefore the *chronologically* earliest things naturally to attract us, and perhaps

to appeal to us as preserving our nature. However, in debates in which Carneades's division plays a part, not all desires that are treated as natural in the relevant way appear early in our development. Notably, a "seed" of justice is the love of a parent for a child, which of course is provoked only in developed adults (Inwood 2016 discusses parental love in *De finibus*; see *De finibus* 3.62, 4.17, 5.65). We better capture all the examples, then, when we interpret the first natural objects of desire—and, where applicable, the first things according to nature—as primarily natural in that my desires for other objects are natural just when I desire them in order to obtain the first things according to nature. My desire for money is
p. 594 natural when I desire it in order ↳ to obtain a first natural object of desire, but it is not when I do not. (Here I am inspired by Inwood's 1985: 218–23 interpretation of primariness in Stoicism specifically.)

28. This temptation is the cause of some complaints about the *divisio*, notably Striker 1996: 312, note 20, cf. Annas 2007: 193–4.

29. Cicero, *De finibus* 4.18, see §2.

30. Kamtekar, this volume and Klein, this volume.

31. Contrary to criticisms leveled at the division by Striker 1986: 312–13 and Annas 2007: 193–4, Cicero keeps distinct "the question of the goal of this art [sc. *prudentia*, practical wisdom, the art of living] from that of the goal of life." In the early part of the exposition of the division (*De finibus* 5.16–18), it is plain that the first natural objects of desire are not necessarily the goals of life, but rather are what the art of life is concerned with. Indeed, these objects of desire might not even be *the* goal of the art of life, which a philosopher could argue is something else, like happiness. Piso tells us about the goals of life, or more precisely the highest good (which for some of these thinkers is distinct from happiness), in *De finibus* 5.19–21.

32. I agree with Algra 1997: 123 and Lévy 1992: 355–6 that the division may have targeted the Stoics in particular, to show how their (alleged) conception of the highest good stuck out as strange among philosophers in the Socratic tradition. I agree with Schofield 2012 that Cicero is right to attribute to Carneades the argument (which was more famously reprised by Antiochus and by Cicero himself) that the Stoics and the Peripatetics differed only verbally.

33. This point (at the end of *De finibus* 5.22) is Antiochus's argument and is not part of Carneades's classification, *pace* Annas 2007: 194.

34. Varro, a contemporary of Cicero, elaborated it into a classification of no fewer than 288 possible views of the highest good. Augustine in turn preserved and used Varro's classification in his own reckoning with pagan ethics in *City of God* 19.1–3.

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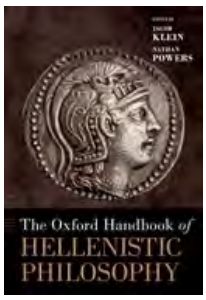
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CHAPTER

26 The Legacies of Academic Skepticism

David Sedley

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on the skeptical Academy's fragmentation during its final decades as a school. A lack of consensus among Carneades's successors over the true meaning of his legacy brought to the fore a weakly doctrinal interpretation of his methodology, namely as a kind of fallibilism. Importantly, this approach found favor with the Academy's final head, Philo of Larissa. Although his stance was intended to promote the school's unity, it instead provoked two distinct breakaway movements. One of these was led by Antiochus of Ascalon, who demanded a reversion to the fully doctrinal stance of the school's early (fourth century BCE) representatives. The other was led by Aenesidemus, who abandoned the Academy and adopted a hardline brand of "Pyrrhonian" skepticism. This disintegration of the Academy can be seen, for reasons discussed briefly at the end of the chapter, as heralding the demise of Hellenistic philosophy itself.

Keywords: Academy, skepticism, Pyrrhonism, Carneades, Philo, Antiochus, Aenesidemus

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1. Outline

This chapter focuses on the skeptical Academy's fragmentation during its final decades as a school. A lack of consensus among Carneades's successors over the true meaning of his legacy brought to the fore a weakly doctrinal interpretation of his methodology, namely as a kind of fallibilism. Importantly, this approach found favor with the Academy's final head, Philo of Larissa, who will stand at the chapter's center. Although his stance was intended to promote the school's unity, it instead provoked two distinct breakaway movements. One of these was led by Antiochus of Ascalon, who demanded a reversion to the fully doctrinal stance of the school's early representatives (fourth century BCE). The other was that of Aenesidemus, who, moving in the opposite direction, abandoned the Academy and adopted a hardline brand of Pyrrhonian skepticism. This disintegration of the Academy can be seen, for reasons to which I shall return briefly at the end of the chapter, as heralding the demise of Hellenistic philosophy itself.[1]

2. Carneades

Can anything be known for certain? As Chapter 23 and Chapter 24 of this volume have shown, this question dominated the polemical confrontation between the New Academy and the Stoa, from Arcesilaus's skirmishes with Zeno of Citium in the early third century BCE to Cicero's presentation, in his *Academic Books* (45 BCE), of a by-then nearly defunct schism within the Academy (*ND* 1.11, *Luc.* 17).

p. 598 From the ancient reports of that confrontation, one might too easily gain the impression that the only topic they debated for two-and-a-half centuries was whether there is or is not such a thing as a "cognitive impression" (*phantasia katalêptikê*), the self-guaranteeing criterion of truth on whose existence the Stoics insisted.

To illustrate why any such impression is misleading, we need to look at the relatively well-documented final major phase of the New Academy that was initiated by Carneades in the mid-second century and continued for at least half a century after his retirement in 137/6 BCE.[2] The epistemology and taxonomy of impressions were certainly high on the agenda, but many other items on that same agenda tackled the problem of certainty in terms of individual philosophical debates, covering all the main areas of the discipline: the moral end, the indifferents, the merits of justice, god, providence, determinism, foreknowledge, bivalence, and so on. Doctrinal philosophers' claims to have achieved certainty in any such areas of the discipline could be challenged by dialectical scrutiny of the relevant debates, even without recourse to the specific epistemological issue of cognitive impressions. A good example is found at Sextus Empiricus *M.* 7.159–65, where, even on the pivotal topic of criterial impressions, Carneades's contribution is reported as a systematic critical survey covering all available positions, and not just the Stoic one. Similar strategies are detectable elsewhere too, for example in Carneades's famous "division" of all actual and possible positions on the moral "goal" or "end."[3]

So subtle and original were Carneades's critical contributions to these debates that many of his followers became convinced that he himself endorsed certain philosophical positions and rejected others, a tendency which invites a comparison to the case of Socrates: numerous fourth-century philosophers, arguably including Plato, had tried to develop out of Socrates's remembered, recorded or reconstructed interrogations of others the most authentic version of "Socratic" philosophy. Similarly in the case of Carneades, innumerable records of his unscripted lectures written up by his followers awaited exegesis. Undoubtedly in some cases these records already, intentionally or otherwise, imposed their writers' own philosophical preferences on Carneades's words. But even when they were bare and strictly neutral transcriptions, it remained open to the post-Carneadean generation of Academics to extract from this record, and reassemble, what could purport to be Carneades's own philosophical beliefs.[4]

To do so was no easy task, because Carneades evidently had never made his ultimate philosophical goals or preferences clear. On the famous occasion in 155 BCE when, on an ambassadorial visit to Rome, he delivered a speech in defense of justice, but shocked his Roman audience the next day with a second speech, this time attacking justice, it was seemingly left to individual auditors to work out how the two speeches were related.[5] Against such a background, in which rival interpretations of Carneades's own philosophical stance flourished and competed, it should be no surprise that Carneades himself, rather than Plato, came to be the Academy's most authoritative figurehead.

3. From Clitomachus to Philo

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Those Academics who were old enough to have known him personally could vie with each other for the status of authorized guides to Carneades's true legacy. For some years the dominant exegete was Clitomachus, who succeeded to the school headship and consistently represented Carneades as the great champion of suspension of assent (Cicero *Luc.*108). True, Clitomachus reported Carneades as proposing reliance on the merely "persuasive" (Greek *pithanon*; Latin *probabile*, "probable": *ib.* 98–102), but that was represented as Carneades's way of explaining why suspension need not necessarily paralyze practical living, and there is no good evidence that it served him as a basis for making philosophical choices.[6]

Meanwhile another leading Academic, Metrodorus of Stratonicea, was protesting that Carneades had been misconstrued as a skeptic, when in reality his attacks on the cognitive impression had been no more than ad hominem critiques of Stoicism: "Metrodorus … is said to have been the first to admit that it had not been a doctrine of the Academics that nothing could be known, but that it had been necessary to take up arms of this kind against the Stoics" (Augustine, *C. Acad.* 3.41).[7] Although Metrodorus never became school-head, he exercised a steadily increasing influence on Philo of Larissa, who headed the Academy in its final phase, from 110 BCE, but had never himself heard Carneades.[8]

True to the Metrodorean interpretation of Carneades, the Philonian Academy retained the Carneadean practice of exploring arguments pro and contra on every issue, but with the aim that after hearing both sides the various parties should each be able to arrive at their own informed and above all independent judgment—not as an objectively certain conclusion, and typically not even as an "opinion" involving committed "assent," but as the "truer" or "more likely" position (Cicero *ND* 3.95).[9] This stance kept in play the traditional role of the Academy as the systematic opponent of all pretensions to certainty, but no longer insisted on universal suspension of judgment.[10] As Cicero says in *On duties*, a treatise in which he advocates in his own voice a fundamentally Stoic ethics, "… our [New] Academy gives us wide freedom, allowing us the right to defend whatever strikes us as most probable" (3.20, cf. 2.7–8). Philo had been Cicero's respected Academic teacher, and although in his usual New Academic spirit he likes to make clear his lack of absolute commitment to anyone's authority (e.g., *ND* 1.10), even to Philo's (*Luc.* 18, 78), his probabilistic methodology is fundamentally the one he learned from Philo.

The growing interest in securing positive outcomes from dialectical encounters fueled the expectation that Carneades himself will have recognized more truth or at least likelihood in some philosophical views than in others, and encouraged his successors to scour the historical record in search of his tacit doctrinal choices. Even Clitomachus, whose more hardline skeptical interpretation of Carneades saw the latter's strategy as one of systematically promoting suspension of judgment (Cicero *Luc.* 108), was ↳ nevertheless quoted as saying that he could never find out what Carneades himself believed (*ib.* 139), thereby implying that his master's strict philosophical neutrality was a partly didactic device, in conjunction with which he had either formally approved, or at any rate been psychologically unable to avoid, certain doctrinal sympathies. On such a reading, Metrodorus's and Philo's main difference from Clitomachus was that they considered Carneades's own views to be in principle recoverable, where Clitomachus had dismissed them as (i) privately held and beyond recovery

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and (ii) marginal to his master's real philosophical project, which had been to keep every philosophical dispute unresolved and subject to further debate.

In this last regard the Clitomachean New Academy more closely resembled the ethos of a modern philosophy department than any other ancient school did. If its trademark goal "suspension of judgment" seems today not to be much valued as a philosophical end in its own right, we may try replacing it with a near-equivalent: the systematic cultivation and retention of an open mind, or, failing that, the ability to appreciate the merits of all competing theories, including those one ultimately rejects.

A good example of how Carneades's aims and methods were interpreted by his Philonian followers can be extracted from Cicero's incompletely preserved *On Fate*. It emerges that Carneades sought to maintain an equal balance between determinism, as defended by the Stoics, and the doctrine of "free will" (*libera voluntas*) championed by the Epicureans.[11] Unfortunately, as he saw it, the Epicurean position was excessively weakened by two implausible premises on which it relied: (1) that one kind of event, the atomic "swerve," can happen without any cause at all; (2) that so long as a future event is not causally predetermined, any proposition predicting it remains neither true nor false. He therefore refashioned Epicurean doctrine so as to avoid both vulnerable components. (1) What free will requires is not something as conceptually repugnant as a totally uncaused event, but an event without any *antecedent* cause; and volition, whose nature is to initiate a new psychological causal chain, is according to Carneades just such an event. (2) If it is now true that X is φ-ing, it will always be true that X has φ-ed, and it has always been true that X would φ. This is simply a matter of tense-logic and has no bearing on predetermination. Defending both revisions in terms, and with examples, that the Epicureans might be expected to approve (24–8), and thus at least formally arguing in their defense, Carneades suggested that by adopting his improvements they would be enabled fully to resist Stoic determinism (23: "... by defending which, he said, they could easily resist Chrysippus").

This looks very much like a Carneadean strategy of keeping the philosophical dispute unresolved, where necessary by defending, developing or even inventing this or that position in order to maintain the equal weight of arguments pro and contra, despite the risk of appearing to some to be expressing his own preference.[12] So far, there is nothing Clitomachus need have disagreed with. Cicero, on the other hand, later in the same work feels free, as a Philonian, to appropriate such theories of psychological causation and tense-logic, presenting them as components of a full Carneadean anti-determinist thesis which he himself as an Academic is at liberty to endorse.

Indeed, given that these philosophically powerful ideas were Carneades's own original contributions, it would be hard not to go along with Cicero and attribute their authorship and ownership to Carneades, even if Carneades himself would presumably not have presented them as decisive.

Unfortunately, Cicero's testimony about Carneades, on which we are heavily reliant, is further distorted by his own deeply-felt concern to make Academic philosophy attractive to a Roman audience. Carneades's pair of antithetical lectures for and against justice had caused much shock at Rome in 155 BCE. Yet, subsequent generations of Romans—for example, Crassus (Cicero *De or.* 1.45–7), not to mention Cicero himself—traveled to Athens to study with Carneades's successors in the Academy. And when in 87 BCE the leading figures of the school were forced by local circumstances to leave Athens, it was to Rome that Cicero's teacher Philo moved. It is not hard to discern the motives which might lead a Philonian like Cicero to soften Carneades's shock tactics. For instance, Cicero's Academic spokesman Philus in a now lost part of *De republica* was at pains to reassure his auditors that Carneades had in his second speech not meant to challenge the moral value of justice (LS 68M):

> With the object of refuting Aristotle and Plato, the champions of justice, Carneades in his first speech assembled all the arguments in favour of justice, in order that he might overturn them [in his second speech], as he did ... not because he thought justice ought to be disparaged, but to show that its defenders had no certain or firm arguments about it.

On this occasion, it was Plato and Aristotle who had provided the material for the defense of justice.[13] According to the Philonian Academy, Carneades had not been denying the merits of justice, or even, as Clitomachus no doubt maintained, promoting suspension of judgment about them: he was simply dispelling the complacent assumption that the issue had been settled, even by these giants.

More often, however, it was contemporary theory, above all that of the Stoa, that had featured in Carneades's critiques, so much so that Carneades became famous for saying that if there had been no Chrysippus there would be no Carneades either (DL 4.62). However, it is easy to misunderstand how this anti-Stoic strategy worked out in detail. To pick one example, Sextus Empiricus in *Adversus mathematicos* Book 9 counters a battery of Stoic proofs for the existence of gods with a further battery of arguments defending the explicit conclusion that no gods exist. Some of the latter are introduced (9.102, cf. 9.1) specifically as Clitomachus's record of Carneades's arguments, and the rest of them are likely to be of the same provenance. It thus seems that Clitomachus presented his master as promoting suspension of judgment, even when it came to the highly sensitive issue of theism versus atheism, by providing equal weight of argument on both sides. Importantly, none of the anti-theistic arguments shows any concern with refuting Stoic theology in particular.[14] When on the other hand some of this same Carneadean set of arguments appears in Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* Book 3 in the mouth of the Academic Cotta, not one of them retains its atheistic conclusion. They ↳ have
p. 602
instead been refashioned into a denunciation of Stoic theology for its inadequate basis in argument. And when Cotta justifies that denunciation (3.44), his words should remind us of the Academic justification of Carneades's twin speeches about justice:

> Carneades used to say these things, not in order to eliminate the gods—for what could be less fitting for a philosopher than that?—but to convict the Stoics of failing to explain anything about the gods.

We can thus see with increasing clarity how the New Academy, still invoking the name of its great figurehead Carneades, as its influence spread among the Roman intelligentsia in the first century BCE was obliged to adapt to a world in which Rome was the dominant power and the main source of patronage. The threatening dialectic whereby Carneades, at least as understood by Clitomachus, had set out to show that there is no more reason to think that gods exist than that they do not, and no more reason to value justice than to disparage it, had to be carefully reframed. Philo had started out as a faithful Clitomachean (Cicero *Luc.* 17), but his eventual preference for this softer, doctrinally permissive refashioning of the Carneadean heritage was all but inevitable.

4. Philo and Antiochus

In the remainder of this chapter Philo's predicament, as outlined earlier, will serve as the reference point for examining the dismemberment of the Academic tradition in the first century BCE. Alongside Philo himself, still the official head of the school, two highly influential figures emerged from the disintegrating Academy. One was Philo's former pupil Antiochus of Ascalon, who sought a return to the "Old Academy." The other was Aenesidemus, the founder (or re-founder: see later in the chapter) of the Pyrrhonist school, which took over from the Academy the skeptical mantle which the latter had largely abandoned.

Each of these three had to consider some institutional questions:

- What part or parts of the Roman world did their school make its primary location?
- Which foundational figure or figures should be looked to as having inaugurated that school's tradition and lent it their authority?
- Was there an unbroken tradition linking the present school to its founder or founders?
- What were the core doctrines and/or methods that gave the school its diachronic identity?

Philosophically, such questions may sound of no more than marginal significance, but in the ancient world they mattered a great deal. Thus, for example under the first heading, the constraints imposed by the need to
p. 603 maintain public tolerance of one's ↳ philosophical activity might well have been felt more keenly in Philo's Rome than in Alexandria, where Aenesidemus set up his new skeptical movement. On the other hand, this latter movement seems to have enjoyed little if any impact at Rome, since it was quite unknown to Cicero when writing in 45 BCE.[15] Alexandria was the Mediterranean world's foremost cultural melting pot, liable to thrive on philosophical diversity. It was also blessed with the finest of all contemporary libraries, which had served as a hub of textual scholarship for the past two centuries. We should not be in the least surprised if it was above all from Alexandria that new movements started to emerge, and at no time more than in the first century BCE. For that was when Athens lost much of its philosophical centrality, thereby fueling a philosophical diaspora around the Mediterranean region—not just at Alexandria and Rome, but at many other cultural hubs such as Rhodes, Tarsus, and the Campanian region of Italy.[16] As philosophy's direct institutionalization in the schools' original Athenian meeting places diminished, it was to be replaced by close study of the texts of Plato, Aristotle, and other classical giants. And this would remain the backbone of philosophical activity for the next half-millennium, coming in the course of time to share much of its methodology with the newly emerging Christian creed. Although Rome's military adventures in the east Mediterranean brought many plundered philosophical libraries to the city, including long-neglected works of Aristotle, Alexandria remained a formidable competitor.

But those changes point above all to the post-Hellenistic era. The period we are now considering—roughly, the early to mid-first century BCE—does mark the first stirrings of a new style of philosophy, into which the legacy of the Academy would have somehow to be fitted. But in other ways, as we will now see, it still clung to some version of the traditional model, centered not just intellectually but institutionally as well on the Athenian schools.

In 87 BCE, following the ravages of a long siege of the city by Sulla, the original Athenian Academy, located in a grove outside the city walls, had ceased to provide suitable conditions for the activities of a philosophical school. As a result, the official school-head Philo and his rival Antiochus found themselves operating out of other cultural hubs—Philo in Rome, Antiochus at least partly in Alexandria.[17] It may well have been this physical distancing from the hallowed grove where Plato and his successors had taught that made Philo's hold on its leadership more tenuous, and emboldened Antiochus to attempt a schism. The story relayed by Cicero (*Luc.* 11–12) is that Antiochus, while resident in Alexandria, received a copy of a work in two books, freshly written by Philo in Rome. To Antiochus's intense (and, we are told, uncharacteristic) annoyance, Philo was maintaining in these new books that there were not two Academies but only one.[18]

What Philo meant was that the so-called New Academy, inaugurated by Arcesilaus in the 260s BCE and still at the height of its powers a century and more later under the headship of Carneades, was in fact a seamless continuation of the "old" Academy, that is, of the school founded by Plato and maintained after his death by his successors Speusippus, Xenocrates, Polemo, and Crates. Here we must separate two issues: Philo's motivation for the new claim, and his historical justification of it.

p. 604 His motivation is not far to seek. By insisting on the unity of the Academic tradition, through an unbroken series of scholarchs from Plato to himself, Philo was laying claim to the formal inheritance of Plato's authority. Antiochus, backed in this by at least one member of his Alexandrian entourage, swore that prior to Philo's new treatise he had never heard of any such historical claim (Cicero *Luc.*11).

The truth is almost certainly that Plato's heritage *had*, at least formally, been passed down from scholarch to scholarch, via the exclusive right to teach from the school-head's *exedra*, a semi-circular structure incorporating a bench, located in the Academy grove itself. From Cicero, *De finibus* 5.4 we learn that in Athens in 79 BCE, eight years after the Alexandrian episode, the *exedra* from which half a century earlier Carneades had taught was still standing.

On the other hand, inheritance of the *exedra* bestowed a primarily titular privilege, not one that automatically made the current head of the Academy the true custodian of Plato's philosophy. Besides, in 87 BCE Philo, unable to work in Athens, was far away from that *exedra*. No wonder, then, if Philo felt the need, at this time of all times, to bolster his right to speak as the single voice of the whole Academy. No wonder, too, that Antiochus should have chosen this same moment to break publicly with Philo.[19]

So much for the underlying motivation of Philo's new "unity of the Academy" thesis. What about its historical justification? Over the next two centuries the unity thesis in fact enjoyed plenty of support among Middle Platonist philosophers, such as the anonymous commentator on Plato's *Theaetetus* and Plutarch, who were happy to regard Carneades as an ally whose systematic critique of Stoicism had kept this enemy at bay on behalf of doctrinal Platonism until the time came for its return.[20]

But was that enough? Notoriously, after all, the school headed by Arcesilaus and Carneades had been opposed to all claims of cognitive certainty; and, consistently with this, Carneades had not spared even Plato himself from his global critique, as his second speech at Rome in 155 BCE forcefully reminds us.

Such seems to be the background against which Philo unveiled an epistemological principle which, according to his "Roman" books, secured the unity of the entire Academy, thus constituting the continuous thread that brought Plato's legacy down to himself. According to Sextus Empiricus (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.235),

> Philo says that, (a) so far as concerns the Stoic criterion—that is, the cognitive impression [*phantasia katalêptikê*]—things [*ta pragmata*] are uncognizable [*akatalêpta*], but (b) so far as concerns the nature [*hoson epi tê(i) phusei*] of the things themselves [*autôn tôn pragmatôn*], they are cognizable [*katalêpta*].[21]

Such was the two-part epistemological stance that Philo attributed to all Academics alike, himself included.

There has been much dispute over what this, Philo's "Roman" position, was supposed to mean. *Katalêpsis*, along with its cognates, was no doubt being invoked as the current Stoic technical term for what in Plato's works (e.g., *Meno*, *Theaetetus*) and elsewhere was normally known as "knowledge" (*epistêmê*, *gnôsis*), and it will be
p. 605 convenient in what ↳ follows to make do with the latter terminology. On a widely favored interpretation of part (a) of Philo's dictum, he was holding out for a redefinition of knowledge: Arcesilaus and Carneades had frustrated all attempts to vindicate infallible cognition, but this need not exclude the possibility of knowledge: instead the basic Stoic epistemological requirement, that knowledge must be infallible, could and should be dropped.[22] Thus (a) knowledge, if required to conform to the famously controversial Stoic definition of *phantasia katalêptikê*, is not attainable, but (b) in reality—i.e., once the correct definition is substituted—it is attainable.

Undeniably part (a) of Philo's dictum, taken on its own, readily lends itself to this definitional interpretation.[23] Part (b), however, poses a problem for such a reading of part (a). The point emphasized in (b) is a modal one which says nothing about an alternative definition of knowledge but explains that things' capacity to be known lies in their own nature: reality has an intrinsic capacity for being known.

The precise expression used, that things are knowable "so far as concerns the nature [*hoson epi tê(i) phusei*] of the things themselves," is not used elsewhere by Sextus, and corresponds more closely to terminology used elsewhere to encapsulate the idea, elaborated in Plato's *Timaeus*, that the world *so far as concerns its own nature* is destructible, namely by god, although thanks to his goodness its destruction will never happen.[24] This technical Platonist usage suggests that the complete epistemological view which Philo espoused, and attributed to the entire Academy, was more likely to be the following: (a) reality is unknowable, but only in the sense that we do not possess—although quite possibly god may do—any infallible cognitive power such as the Stoics had described under their term *phantasia katalêptikê*; (b) the fault for this unknowability does not lie in reality itself, since reality in its own nature *is* knowable.[25]

It is not hard to conjecture how this qualified position on knowledge might have been attributed by Philo to the whole Academy, starting from Plato's *Timaeus*, regarded in antiquity as the authoritative guide to his philosophy. There, Plato famously asserts that we can achieve no better than a "likely" (*eikos*) account of the world (29b–c). If as seems probable Philo took this to allow that the divine creator himself, who actually constructed the world, does have secure knowledge of it, he will have found strong support in Timaeus's immediately ensuing remark (29c–d): "If then, Socrates, we provide accounts that are no less likely than those of others, we must be content, remembering that I the speaker and you the judges have a human nature, so that we should accept the likely story about these things, and seek nothing beyond it."

This position, according to which knowledge is impossible *for human beings*, rather than absolutely, could easily be presented as one that united the Philonian Academy with Plato and Socrates (cf. Plato, *Apol.* 23a–b), via a line of more recent Academic scholarchs stretching back to the great Carneades, and beyond him to Arcesilaus. And earlier Academic scholarchs too could be brought under the same umbrella, including even the first doctrinal Platonist Xenocrates, who was being read as advocating a fallible criterion of truth regarding the nature of the physical world.[26]

After his immediate outburst of anger, how did Antiochus react? In two ways, it seems, of which the first was a
p. 606 denial of the claim's historicity. For it was clearly in ↳ response to Philo's recasting of history that Antiochus wrote a passage paraphrased at Cicero, *Academica* 1.18–33. There he both emphasizes the *dis*unity of the Academic-Peripatetic tradition, and very specifically reports the early Academics—in words (1.30–1) that show he has in mind the *Timaeus*, especially 27d–28a—as blaming the world's unknowability precisely on its own radically unstable and in other ways inaccessible nature. Thus, crucially, even Plato himself was absolved of having endorsed the thesis which according to Philo, by contrast, had united the whole Academy.

Antiochus's other line of response—which need not be assumed to date from that same incident in 87 BCE, but was in all probability encouraged by it—was to advocate a return, albeit with updated terminology, to the doctrinal positions of the fourth-century Academy, the "Old Academy" as he called it. Not unlike Philo in this regard, what Antiochus was seeking to reinstate was the authority of the Academic tradition. It was to this early Academic tradition *as a whole*, and not to any individual within in, not even to Plato, that Antiochus declared allegiance. So much was this the case that, as we shall see shortly, when he was provoked into rejecting Philo's thesis of the unity of the Academy, he was prepared to part company with Plato himself, to the extent of insisting that the founder had declared the world inherently unknowable (*Ac.* 1.30–1) —a view Antiochus certainly did not and could not share.

There were two further important differences between Antiochus's and Philo's constructions of Academic history. One was that Antiochus excluded the New Academy from that tradition. Despite his admiration for Carneades himself, so strong that he was ready to adapt Carneadean arguments and taxonomies to his own philosophical purposes, the two centuries of the New Academy had to be largely discounted as an aberration from true Academic philosophy. His leading contemporaries the Stoics, he maintained, although dwarves on the shoulders of the Old Academic giants, had been right to stand up against Arcesilaus's and Carneades's captious rejection of all aspirations to knowledge.[27]

The other difference from Philo lies in Antiochus's choice of authorities. Yes, Plato had inaugurated the Academic tradition, perhaps jointly with Socrates. But the new rekindling of the school's philosophy that Antiochus sought was best achieved in his view by looking less to these distant and often enigmatic figureheads than to its *latest* representatives before its regrettable collapse into skepticism under the headship of Arcesilaus. In Antiochus's eyes the writings of these final summative spokesmen could be expected to encapsulate the whole of early Academic philosophy in its most developed and articulate form. On that basis the two leading spokesmen of Old Academic philosophy were deemed by him to be Polemo, the last major head of the early school, and, surprising as it may seem from our own historical perspective, Aristotle, along with his leading pupil and eventual successor Theophrastus. In the eyes of many, Antiochus among them, Aristotle had

remained fundamentally an Academic, indeed the ultimate technical expositor of what were at root Plato's own ideas.

Antiochus and Philo were the last identifiable voices of the Athenian Academy. Antiochus had many pupils of his own, but the ever-growing importance of a reemerging Aristotle led at least some of them in due course to re-identify as Peripatetics. Whether ↳ Philo even had a successor as scholarch is doubtful (cf. Cicero *Luc.* 2.17). The Academy had in effect ceased to exist.[28]

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Many have credited Antiochus with being the founder of Middle Platonism, a doctrinal version of Platonism based above all on close study of the dialogues, which by the late first century CE was on its way to dominating the philosophical scene. That would make Antiochus's philosophical turn a decisive factor in the eclipse and ultimate disappearance of Hellenistic philosophy itself.

But consider the three most recognizable hallmarks of doctrinal Platonism, all of them found both in the early Academy under Plato's successors Speusippus, Xenocrates and Polemo, and again in the Middle Platonist era: (a) the divinization of the founder, (b) the naming of the school as "Platonist," after the founder, and not just as the "Academy" after its institutional location, and (c) the minute study of his canonical texts, including his great physical manifesto the *Timaeus*.[29] By these criteria Antiochus, far from being the first Middle Platonist, was not even a Platonist. His allegiance was to a broad Academic alliance, of which Plato was the honored founder but by no means still the leading voice.

5. Aenesidemus

Was the Hellenistic Academy's major contribution to Western philosophy, namely systematic skepticism, now defunct? By no means. As the school entered the Roman world, softened its hostility to constructive doctrine, and lost its institutional cohesion, a Cretan named Aenesidemus sought to restore its legacy by a radical new departure, quitting the Academy to form his own school. Although his patron was a Roman patrician, we should not be surprised that he found the multi-cultural city of Alexandria the natural home for his breakaway skeptical movement.[30]

The Byzantine author Photius reports him as follows:[31]

> In writing [his eight *Pyrrhonist Discourses*] Aenesidemus addresses them to Lucius Tubero, one of his colleagues from the Academy, a Roman by birth, with an illustrious ancestry and a distinguished political career. In the first discourse he differentiates between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics in almost precisely the following words …
>
> (LS 71C4–5)

We will turn to those words shortly, but first a terminological caution is due. Today Aenesidemus's "Pyrrhonist" movement is known to us primarily from the extensive surviving writings of its second-century CE adherent, the doctor Sextus Empiricus. By Sextus's day, alongside the title "Pyrrhonists" ("followers of Pyrrho"), an alternative name for the school had come to be favored: namely "Skeptics" (*skeptikoi*), literally "inquirers." It is important that this title, with initial capital, should be reserved for the Pyrrhonist movement. When we speak
p. 608 of "Academic skeptics" as I have done earlier in ↳ the chapter, that is the *modern* use of the word "skeptic," to designate someone inclined to systematic doubt. Much confusion has been caused by a tendency among scholars to speak of Arcesilaus, Carneades, and other New Academics as the "(Academic) Skeptics," a capital letter which should (at least in English) be avoided at all costs in this context.

Pyrrho (fourth century BCE) had been an inspirational guru-figure, legendary for his extraordinary tranquility, disavowal of knowledge, and lack of pretension.[32] The legend was largely the creation of his contemporary

follower and admirer, the satirical poet Timon of Phlius, whose verses in Pyrrho's praise Aenesidemus undoubtedly canonized when founding—or, as he might have preferred to put it, re-founding—his movement. Importantly, Pyrrho had predated Arcesilaus, who had first turned the Academy away from constructive philosophy and toward skepticism. Aenesidemus's choice of Pyrrho as his school's figurehead and virtual founder will thus have helped him present his secession from the Philonian Academy less as a desertion than as a return to the more ancient, and to that extent more authentic, skeptical tradition. The analogy with Antiochus's roughly contemporary secession from the Philonian Academy and return to the "ancients" is not far to seek.

The details of Aenesidemus's own full philosophical agenda are controversial, and fall outside the scope of the present chapter, since they require extensive exploration of Pyrrhonism as later expounded by Sextus Empiricus.[33] Instead, we may end by examining the four reasons given by Aenesidemus in Photius's report, shortly after the passage quoted earlier, for his disillusionment with the contemporary Philonian Academy.

> They posit some things with confidence and unambiguously deny others.
>
> (LS 71C5)

This will not refer to some fixed body of doctrines, even of provisional doctrines, avowed in common by the whole contemporary Academy: there was none. It will refer rather to the Philonian dialectical method which encouraged Academics, after hearing both sides in any debate, to make individual choices as to which of the currently competing positions they found to have more likelihood or truth. As we have seen, antecedents of this Academic policy may have been already detectable in the Clitomachean Academy, which in turn relied on a defensible interpretation of Carneades. But it was only in the Philonian phase of the Academy that the policy came to define the regular dialectical procedure.

> But the Academics, he says, especially those from the present-day Academy, are sometimes in agreement with Stoic beliefs, and to tell the truth turn out to be Stoics fighting with Stoics.
>
> (LS 71C8)

p. 609 Here we may recall and compare the example later set by Cicero, with his provisional endorsement of Stoic positions in *De officiis* (see esp. 2.7–8) and at the end of *De natura deorum*. Even in the *De fato*, despite his initial show of hostility to Stoic determinism (see §3) Cicero goes on to minimize the gap between his own "Carneadean" stance and the Stoic one, and to do all he can to marginalize the Epicureans, whom he had initially allowed to serve as Carneades's temporary allies.

> Moreover, they are doctrinaire about many things. For they introduce virtue and folly, and posit good and bad, truth and falsity, persuasive and unpersuasive, existent and non-existent. They give firm determinations for many other things too.
>
> (LS 71C9)

Here "persuasive and unpersuasive" alludes to the basic pair of philosophical criteria underlying the Philonians's policy of provisional endorsement, discussed earlier in this chapter. But Aenesidemus's full description must also include in its scope determinate doctrinal positions proclaimed by other individual Academics, albeit in the usual probabilistic terms. An example, perhaps even one of the texts Aenesidemus had in mind, is Philo's own systematic division of philosophy (recorded in Stobaeus *Ecl.* 2.7 = Philo test. XXXII Brittain), which sets out an agenda for the therapeutic handling of such philosophical concerns as virtue, goods and bads, and false and sound opinions. This was Philo's own philosophical manifesto, not the whole school's, but we must assume that others of the school's adherents awarded themselves the same license to develop their own doctrinal positions.

> It is only about the cognitive impression that they express dissent.

That the one remaining fixed doctrine of the Academy under Philo was *akatalêpsia*, the impossibility of cognition, is confirmed by Cicero.[34] Again, that this was indeed professed as their own "doctrine" (Greek *dogma*, Latin *decretum*) is well attested (e.g., Cicero *Luc.*29, Augustine *C. Acad.* 2.11). No actual self-contradiction need be involved, because one could in principle profess adherence to a "doctrine" without claiming to "know" its truth.[35] But as Aenesidemus reasonably felt, and expressed in the *Pyrrhonist Discourses*, a near-intolerable tension was involved:

> The Academics are unaware that they are conflicting with themselves. For to make unambiguous assertions and denials, at the same time as stating as a generalization that no things are cognitive, introduces an undeniable conflict: how is it possible to recognize that this is true, this false, yet still entertain perplexity and doubt, and not make a clear choice of the one and avoidance of the other?
>
> (LS 71C11)

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6. The End of Hellenistic Philosophy

Aenesidemus's words, written in the early decades of the first century BCE, herald a parting of ways. If skeptical suspension of judgment was to return to being a genuine philosophical option, it could no longer thrive in the Academy. Now that the school founded by Plato had reverted to doctrinal assertiveness, with or (as is more probable) even without Antiochus's encouragement it made obvious sense for that movement to reappropriate the richest and most seminal part of its doctrinal legacy, the writings of Plato himself. The age that followed, today known as the era of Middle Platonism, was one in which the minute study of Platonic texts was to become a central activity. True, the by-then antiquated language of the Platonic corpus had to be relearned, and this process took time to gather pace. But scattered around the new Roman empire there were plenty of Platonist teachers ready to facilitate such a refamiliarization—which in any case corresponded to a current educational fashion for returning to classical Greek prose style, an art of which, it so happened, Plato was one of the great practitioners. In the first two centuries CE, while Platonism steadily grew to dominance, Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Academic skepticism would retain a significant presence in philosophical discourse, alongside a steadily reemerging Aristotelianism. But already by the mid-first century BCE, the Hellenistic epoch, during which these movements had both set the philosophical agenda and proceeded to dominate it, was drawing to its end.

Notes

1. The testimonies for Philo, Antiochus, and Aenesidemus can be found in, respectively, Brittain 2001, Sedley 2012a, and Polito 2014.
2. For Carneades's major contributions to epistemological debate, see Bett, this volume and the bibliography recommended there.
3. Wynne, this volume.
4. Bett, this volume.
5. On this event, see Inwood, this volume.
6. Cf. SE *M.* 7.166–75 for the attribution of a similarly pragmatic use of the *pithanon* to Carneades himself. For a contrasting view, see Bett, this volume.

7. Cf. also Philodemus, *Ind.Ac.* col.26, "He [Metrodorus] said that everyone had misunderstood Carneades: for he had not considered all things unknowable [*akatalêpta*] …" (text breaks off). Cf. Cicero *Luc.* 16–17, *De or.* 1.45.

8. For a comprehensive study of Philo and his development, with an appendix of testimonia, see Brittain 2001. Görler 1994: §51 is also of exceptional value.

9. The characterization of Cicero's stance as Philonian is controversial, with some leading scholars maintaining that he is in fact a Clitomachean skeptic rather than a Philonian fallibilist (including Wynne 2014, Brittain 2016; cf. Bett, this volume). Against such an identification, note that, according to *De fato* 1–4, (i) the recognizably Philonian outcome of *De natura deorum* paraphrased earlier, with each party free to prefer as "truer" or "more likely" one of the positions debated, was Cicero's *intended* outcome of the work; (ii) the same aim was shared by *De divinatione*; and (iii) but for circumstances it would have been shared by *De fato* too. Cf. also Galen, *De optima doctrina* 1: Favorinus praised the Academics for speaking on both sides of a dispute, while "trusting their pupils to choose the truer ones"; and Cicero *Ad Att*. 2.3.3 (December 60 BCE): "*venio nunc … ad* [Greek: *hupostasin*] *nostram ac* [Greek: *politeian*], *in qua* [Greek: *Sôkratikôs eis hekateron*], *sed tamen ad extremum, ut illi solebant,* [Greek: *tên areskousan*]." That this body of evidence refers to the Philonian Academy is overwhelmingly likely, especially as in *ND*, where the method is most evidently applied, Cicero often refers appreciatively to his Academic training under Philo (1.6, 17, 59, 113), while never mentioning Clitomachus.

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10. See Cicero *Luc.* 78, where the speaker Cicero says: "This [i.e., *akatalêpsia*, the impossibility of secure knowledge] is the only [Academic] contention that has endured till the present [i.e., the Philonian phase]. For the further point that the sage will not assent to anything had no bearing on this argument, since it was permitted for a sage to have no knowledge and yet hold opinions." Cicero himself (cf. 67) disagrees with Metrodorus and Philo on this last point, that according to Carneades the sage may hold mere opinions, instead endorsing Clitomachus's evidence that this concession had originated more as a dialectical move by Carneades than as the latter's own philosophical stance. This is an exercise of Cicero's vaunted Academic independence of all authorities, and does not suffice to make him a Clitomachean, as some have assumed or inferred. The acknowledgment of a historical distinction between the Clitomachean and Philonian phases of the Academy (cf. SE *PH* 1.220; ps.-Galen, *Phil. hist.* 3, Diels *Dox.* 600.3–4) seems unlikely to have turned on nothing more than subtle (and perhaps ultimately elusive) differences between competing accounts of provisional assent, and likely to owe much more to the two palpably different dialectical practices that I have been emphasizing.

11. On this doctrine, see Warren, this volume.

12. For positions invented by Carneades, see, e.g., LS 64G5, 69L. For recognition of Carneades's tendency to give the impression of endorsing positions he was in reality defending only for dialectical reasons, cf. Cicero *Luc.* 131, 139, *Fin.*5.20.

13. One thinks for example of Plato's *Republic* Books 4 and 9 and of Aristotle's explanations of natural justice in *Rhetoric* 1.13 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.7. According to Philodemus's *History of the Academy*, col. 22 (on the new reading of Fleischer 2021), Carneades, asked why he wrote nothing, replied that everything had already been said by the ancients. The *Republic*, with its arguments against justice in Books 1–2 and ensuing counter-arguments in favor of justice, is a good illustration of why he might say this.

14. This is well observed by Görler 1994: 886–7. I develop the point in Sedley 2020.

15. Cicero refers to Pyrrho in some ten passages, but only as a moral philosopher, and believes (*Tusc.* 5.85) that he no longer has any followers, which would make no sense if he had heard about the neo-Pyrrhonist movement founded by Aenesidemus.

16. I have elaborated on this theme in Sedley 2003.

17. For philosophy in first-century BCE Alexandria, cf. Hatzimichali 2011, Fleischer, 2016.

18. This relies on the almost irresistible assumption that the books that so enraged Antiochus were the same *libri* of Philo as those reported in *Ac.*1.13.

19. On the contested dating of Antiochus's secession, see Hatzimichali 2012, who assembles strong reasons for not placing it before the events of 87 BCE.

20. See Anonymous *In Theaet.* 54.14–55.13 = 1I in Boys-Stones 2018; and Plutarch, Lamprias catalog 63, for his lost work *On the Unity of the Academy from Plato Onwards*.

p. 612 21. *hoson men epi tô(i) Stôikô(i) kritêriô(i), toutesti tê(i) katalêptikê(i) phantasia(i), akatalêpta einai ta pragmata, hoson de epi tê(i) phusei tôn pragmatôn autôn, katalêpta.*

22. This, the most widely endorsed modern interpretation, is fully defended by Brittain 2001: chapter 3. The alternative reading that I advocate later in this chapter and in Sedley 2012b: 85–6, although Brittain calls it the "standard" one, as far as I know had no active defenders between Brochard 1887: 196–202 and Glucker 1978: 82.

23. However, I know of no other source that confirms this interpretation of part (a). The hostile paraphrase of Philo's thesis at Cicero *Luc.* 18 could itself fit either of the readings considered here, but at *Luc.* 112 the view that *katalêpsis* need not entail infallibility is presented by Cicero solely as a Peripatetic thesis, with no reference back to Philo.

24. Cf. Aetius 2.4.2: *phtharton men ton kosmon hoson epi tê(i) phusei … ou mên phtharêsomenon ge, pronoia(i) kai sunochê(i) theou.*

25. According to Brittain 2001: 138–40, *hoson de epi tê(i) phusei tôn pragmatôn autôn* "does not mean much more than 'in fact.'" I would say, on the contrary, that it refers to the inherent nature of the very "things" that have already been mentioned as the putative objects of cognition.

26. Sextus Empiricus *M.* 7.147–8. The paraphrase, although cast in partly anachronistic terms, almost certainly comes from Antiochus's *Canonica* (cf. 7.162, 201–2), which could be Philo's direct source.

27. This is the central theme of Lucullus's Antiochian speech at Cicero *Luc.* 11–62.

28. This is a major finding of Glucker 1978.

29. My reason for emphasizing these particular criteria is that they had almost exact counterparts in the Epicurean school: Epicurus's divinization, the naming of the school as "Epicurean," not just "the Garden," and the constant appeals to the authority of his major physical treatise, *On Nature*. Interestingly, all three features are absent from the Stoa. (For "Platonist" used to designate a member of the early Academy, see Cicero *ND* 1.72–3.)

30. Aristocles *ap.* Eusebius, *Pr. ev.* 14.18.29. On Alexandria, see §4.

31. For a full presentation of this text, see Polito 2014.

32. Long, this volume.

33. Schwab, this volume.

34. *Luc.* 78, see note 4.

35. Even if one did claim to know that nothing could be known, there were mechanisms for avoiding the charge of self-contradiction: see Burnyeat 1997 on Antipater.

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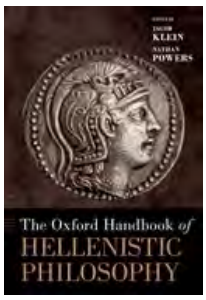
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CHAPTER

27 The Pyrrhonist Rejection of Academic Epistemology

Whitney Schwab

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Abstract

This chapter considers whether, when Pyrrhonists reject the Academic Skeptics' notion of the plausible impression (*phantasia pithanê*), they mean to report that they find *all* impressions equipollent (i.e., equal in their convincingness). It argues against a long-standing and widespread view that Pyrrhonists do discriminate among their impressions, and then explores the consequences of this position for other central elements of Pyrrhonism. In particular, this chapter maintains that Pyrrhonian Skeptics do not suspend judgment universally but rather assent to some impressions, form beliefs, and can engage in a wide range of actions. Finally, it argues that by recognizing that Pyrrhonists do not find all their impressions to be equipollent, Pyrrhonism is a more viable position than is often thought.

Keywords: Pyrrhonism, Pyrrho, Academy, equipollence, plausible impression, suspension of judgment, Sextus Empiricus, skepticism

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1. The Academy to Aenesidemus's Defection

The first philosophers in the Greek tradition to refer to themselves as "skeptics" (*skeptikoi*) were the Pyrrhonists, members of a movement that broke off from Plato's Academy in the first century BCE. From the perspective of Aenesidemus, the movement's founder, the Academics had over the previous two centuries increasingly compromised their philosophical stance, primarily under the pressure of Stoic objections. Aenesidemus pithily distilled his understanding of the contemporary philosophical scene as "Stoics fighting Stoics" (Photius *Biblio*. 212, 170a16–17).

To understand Pyrrhonism, it will help to frame it against a (brief and necessarily selective) outline of the history of the Academy up to Aenesidemus's defection.[1] After Plato's death (348/7 BCE), the Academy was led by Speusippus, Xenocrates, Polemo, and Crates, each of whom drove philosophical research in the direction of developing substantive theories. After Crates's death, Arcesilaus became head of the school (sometime between 268 and 264 BCE) and established, as its central philosophical method, the practice of arguing for and against any position that came up for debate.[2] In keeping with this practice, Arcesilaus and his immediate followers did not aim to develop theories, concepts, or tools of their own, but rather engaged critically with those developed by other philosophers.[3]

Chief among the Academics' opponents were the Stoics, and chief among the topics of debate was the possibility of an epistemic achievement the Stoics called "cognition" (*katalêpsis*). The Stoics defined cognition
p. 615 as assent to a cognitive impression (*phantasia ↳ katalêptikê*), which, in rough terms, is an impression that is not only true but, given how it arose, could not have been false.[4] The Academics, quite naturally, argued against the existence of cognitive impressions. Coupled with the Stoic view that one ought to assent only to cognitive impressions, this position entails that one should never assent at all.[5]

Over the next two centuries, the debate between Academics and Stoics evolved in fascinating ways. Right from the outset, the Stoics, in addition to defending their view that some impressions do warrant assent (i.e., are cognitive), mounted a vigorous counter-attack against the Academics: the inaction (*apraxia*) objection, which alleges that action is impossible without assent.[6] Carneades, who became scholarch of the Academy sometime before 155 BCE, effected a major evolution in the debate. He argued that, while there are no *cognitive* impressions, there are *plausible* (*pithanê*) impressions that warrant a positive mental reaction distinct from Stoic assent. Carneades called this reaction "approval" (*adprobare* in Cicero's Latin). Although intense debate surrounds whether Carneades advanced this alternative as something he himself accepted or merely as a further dialectical move, Aenesidemus, as we will see, thought it constituted a serious corruption of the Academy's philosophical practice.[7] In what appears to have been a final outrage, Philo, who became scholarch in approximately 110 BCE, gradually migrated to the view that cognition is in fact possible, but that the Stoics had mischaracterized what impressions must be like to yield cognition.[8] According to Philo, the Stoics had erred in thinking that cognitive impressions must be *infallible*. In effect, Philo argued that the epistemic achievement Academics since Arcesilaus had argued is impossible is, in fact, possible, but that the Stoics had misconceived its nature.

Aenesidemus, one of Philo's students, found something seriously wrong with the state of things.[9] Unfortunately, none of Aenesidemus's writings survive. We do, however, possess a summary of Aenesidemus's *Pyrrhonian Discourses* by a Byzantine scholar named Photius, including a detailed report of its first book in which Aenesidemus "introduces the difference between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics." Although Aenesidemus lodges many complaints, a central theme is that the Academics are "dogmatic" insofar as they, for example, "introduce virtue and vice, posit good and bad, truth and falsity, the plausible and implausible, being and not-being."[10]

The question of how Aenesidemus and his followers conceived of the relationship between their own philosophical practice and the Academic practice initiated by Arcesilaus is thorny. Even within the later Greek tradition, people found sufficient similarities between the two to warrant applying the label "skeptical" to both.[11] An important clue, however, is furnished by our chief source for Pyrrhonism: Sextus Empiricus, who lived about two centuries after Aenesidemus's defection from the Academy.[12] Sextus distinguishes the "Middle" Academy of Arcesilaus from the "New" Academy of Carneades and Clitomachus, and allows that the former "persuasion and ours are virtually the same" (*PH* 1.232), while frequently contrasting the latter with Pyrrhonism.[13] Similarly, Photius implies that Aenesidemus objected primarily to Academic developments that began with Carneades.[14]

Despite the picture that thus emerges of his rebellion primarily against the New (i.e., post-Carneadean)
p. 616 Academy, it is worth noting that Aenesidemus did not name his ↳ movement after Arcesilaus or any other member of the Academy. Instead, for reasons that remain unclear, he named it after Pyrrho, a philosopher active from approximately 325 to 275 BCE whose own position is obscure to us, but to whom no one would apply the label "Academic."[15]

In this chapter, I examine central elements of Pyrrhonism by focusing on Sextus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*PH*). While I will consider how Pyrrhonism may have attempted to ameliorate several of the problems Aenesidemus identified with New Academic skepticism, I focus on the contention that Pyrrhonists, unlike Academics, say that "nothing is plausible or implausible." Although I agree with many interpreters that this marks a serious disagreement between the Academics and the Pyrrhonists, I think that the Pyrrhonist disavowal of plausible impressions has been largely misunderstood. This misunderstanding, I argue, leads to further misunderstandings of the nature of Pyrrhonian assent, belief, and even the very possibility of Pyrrhonism.

2. Definition of Pyrrhonism

Nowadays, skepticism is (roughly) the thesis that knowledge is impossible (either in general or in some domain), and a skeptic is someone who accepts that thesis. Sextus, however, defines skepticism as an ability (*dunamis*), and a skeptic as someone who possesses that ability:

> **T1** [8] Skepticism is an ability to produce opposites, opposing things which appear and are thought of in any way whatsoever, from which we come first to suspension of judgement, because of the equipollence in the opposed items and *logoi*, then after this to tranquility ...[16] [11] The Pyrrhonian philosopher has been implicitly defined in our account of the concept of the Skeptical persuasion: a Pyrrhonian is someone who possesses this ability.
>
> (*PH* 1.8–11, tr. of [8] from Morison 2011: 269)

So being a Pyrrhonist is not a matter of having certain beliefs but rather of having a certain ability. It is important to note that, although Sextus explains that "we call [skepticism] an ability not in any fancy sense, but simply in the sense of 'to be able to' " (*PH* 1.9), he must nevertheless conceive of skepticism as a highly specialized ability. Because skeptics are people who possess a certain ability and Sextus clearly thinks not all philosophers are skeptics (see *PH* 1.1–4 and 209–31), that ability must be something that not every philosopher, let alone every person, possesses. In what follows I shall object to certain interpretations of Pyrrhonism on the grounds that they cannot make sense of Sextus's conception of skepticism as a highly specialized ability.

Skepticism is specifically an ability to oppose *logoi* (the plural of *logos*).[17] Interpreters debate whether, in **T1**, "*logos*" means statement or argument. Sextus's immediate clarification that "by 'opposed *logoi*' we do not
p. 617 necessarily have in mind affirmation and ↳ negation but take the phrase simply in the sense of conflicting" (*PH* 1.10) suggests the former, since affirmation and negation are most easily understood as classifications of statements. However, shortly after **T1**, Sextus tells us that "the chief constitutive principle [*archê sustaseôs*] of skepticism is the claim that 'to every *logos* an equal *logos* is opposed' " (*PH* 1.12). Sextus later fleshes out this principle as follows:

> **T2** When we say "Opposed to every *logos* there is an equal *logos*," we mean by "every" every one we have inspected; we speak not of *logoi* in an unqualified sense but of those which purport to establish something in a dogmatic fashion (i.e. about something non-evident)—which purport to establish it in any way, and not necessarily by way of premises and conclusion.
>
> (*PH* 1.202)

Two things are clear from **T2**.[18] First, "*logos*," as it factors in the constitutive principle of skepticism, must mean argument, since the opposed *logoi* each purport to establish something (*kataskeuazonta ti*). Given that Sextus first states that principle immediately after defining skepticism in **T1**—which explicitly invokes the notion of opposed *logoi*—we should take "*logos*" to have the same force in that definition. Thus, skepticism is an ability to oppose *arguments*. Arguments, then, are opposed when their conclusions—i.e., the "something" (*ti*) that each purports to establish—are incompatible. Second, skeptics are not restricted to opposing only deductively valid arguments (i.e., arguments that purport to establish by way of premises and conclusion). Although Sextus does not specify what he has in mind, it seems from the way he proceeds that any consideration of reasons, evidence, or the like in favor of P counts as offering an argument for P.

Skepticism is not merely an ability to oppose arguments, but to oppose *equipollent* (*isosthenês*) arguments.[19] That is, the opposed arguments are "equal with regard to being convincing or unconvincing (*kata pistin kai apistian*)" (*PH* 1.10). Although the exact nature of equipollence is disputed, for our purposes a rough understanding will suffice. Suppose someone simply asserts that Φ-ing is permissible. Insofar as this is a bare assertion, it is no more or less convincing than a bare assertion that Φ-ing is impermissible.[20] Now consider the following two arguments (in the broad sense of "argument" discussed earlier):

Argument A:	Φ-ing is permissible according to the Koran.
	Φ-ing is permissible.
Argument B:	Φ-ing is impermissible according to the Bible.
	Φ-ing is impermissible.

Arguments A and B are opposed—their conclusions are incompatible. Considered in isolation, they are also equipollent—they both employ what Morison calls the same "epistemic strategy" in appealing to scriptural authority.[21] Of course, one might immediately question the relative authority of the Koran and the Bible. To do so, however, would ↳ be to go beyond Arguments A and B. If, for example, someone claims that the Koran is more authoritative than the Bible, that claim would be either bare assertion—in which case it would be equipollent to the bare assertion that the Bible is more authoritative—or supported by argument, to which skeptics will oppose yet further arguments. We can see how such exchanges ultimately lead to debate over whether criteria of truth exist—roughly, whether there are means by which propositions can be established without appeal to further propositions. It is no surprise, then, that Sextus begins the "specific account" of skepticism, in which he "argues against each of the parts of what [the Dogmatists] call philosophy" (*PH* 1.6), by discussing criteria of truth. He does this, he tells us, because "the three parts [of philosophy] require judgment and a criterion" (*PH* 2.13).

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We can now understand why Sextus thinks that skepticism is a specialized ability. It is one thing to be able to produce some argument for P* in opposition to an argument for P (where P and P* are incompatible). Any reasonably competent philosopher can do that. However, it is much more difficult to be able to construct, in opposition to any argument in favor of P, an *equally convincing* argument in favor of P*.[22] On this account the famous modes (*tropoi*) of skepticism, which Sextus characterizes as ways "suspension of judgment comes about for [Pyrrhonists]" and discusses at length (*PH* 1.31–186), are templates for producing such equipollent opposed arguments. They identify various general epistemic strategies and templates for the construction of an equipollent argument in response to an argument given by a dogmatist.[23]

So, skepticism is an ability to oppose equipollent arguments, leading to suspension of judgment (*epochê*). Suspension of judgment, Sextus tells us, is a "standstill of the intellect, owing to which we neither reject nor posit anything" (*PH* 1.10). So, in the first instance, suspension of judgment is induced over a specific question "P?" by marshaling equipollent arguments in favor of P and P*. On this basis, skeptics find themselves unable to assert either P or P*. If, for example, all one has to go on in determining whether Φ-ing is permissible are arguments A and B, one will find oneself unable to affirm or deny that Φ-ing is permissible. And skeptics find further that whenever they engage in open-minded and diligent inquiry, for every argument in favor of Φ-ing being permissible they can construct an equipollent argument for Φ-ing being impermissible. Thus, they find themselves continually unable to affirm or deny, as a result of inquiry, whether Φ-ing is permissible.

This coheres well with Sextus's repeated report that skeptics inquire into things and suspend judgment not unqualifiedly but "as far as argument goes" (*hoson epi tô(i) logô(i)*) (e.g., at *PH* 1.20 and 215).[24] The skeptic has, thus, not completed their inquiry either by determining whether Φ-ing is permissible or by determining that it is impossible to determine whether Φ-ing is permissible. They are, thus, in a position to continue inquiring whether Φ-ing is permissible. Hence, their referring to themselves as "*skeptikoi*," meaning the ones who (continue to) inquire.[25]

I said that skeptics suspend judgment whether P on the basis of considering two opposed arguments "in the first instance." The reason for this qualification is that matters can become significantly more complicated.
p. 619 Sextus suggests that skeptics will consider ↳ not only first-order arguments concerning P but also second-order arguments concerning the argumentative situation concerning P.[26] Moreover, seasoned skeptics will often not explicitly produce an argument for P* when they encounter an argument for P. When one's skeptical ability is highly developed, they will often suspend judgment whether P simply by noting the structure of a dogmatist's argument for P. In a sense, they "see" that an equipollent opposed argument can be constructed. Thus, we sometimes find Sextus simply noting that an argument employs, for example, reasoning ad infinitum and moving on without explicitly constructing an opposed argument (e.g., at *PH* 2.92, 3.36, and 3.53). This need not indicate that Pyrrhonists countenanced suspension of judgment by means other than the consideration of equipollent arguments. It may simply reflect the fact that experience often provides shortcuts of this kind.

A final element in Sextus's account of skepticism is the claim that suspension of judgment leads to tranquility (*ataraxia*). To understand this, consider what Sextus calls the "causal principle" (*archê aitiôdês*) of skepticism:

> **T3** The causal principle of skepticism we say is the hope of becoming tranquil. Men of talent, troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil.
>
> (*PH* 1.12)

Like many people, skeptics, before becoming skeptics, found that the world presents itself in conflicting ways. For some people, registering this causes no distress, but for some, including nascent skeptics, it causes great distress. Thus, they set out to investigate how the world really is, thinking that by settling such matters they would become tranquil. Over the course of their investigations (perhaps after first thinking they had settled certain matters), they find that if they are diligent, open-minded, intellectually honest, and so on, every argument for P can be matched by an equally strong argument for P*. Perhaps at first this experience causes even greater distress. However, over time, by repeatedly marshaling arguments on all sides of every matter, developing their skeptical ability, skeptics find themselves tranquil about the matters that initially troubled them. They do not think that they have found the truth, and they also do not think that the truth is unattainable, but they no longer find their inability to settle matters causing them distress. Thus, they find themselves having attained what they sought, but by a different route than they had initially anticipated.[27]

Skepticism, then, is a highly specialized ability to produce, for any argument P, an equally convincing argument for P*. Such arguments can, but need not, take the form of deductively valid arguments. By repeatedly exercising that ability, skeptics repeatedly suspend judgment (as far as argument goes) and, as a result, find themselves in a state of tranquility. As many interpreters note, Sextus's report that tranquility is the aim of Pyrrhonism (1.25) seems to constitute a significant departure from Academic skepticism.[28] Although I am inclined to agree, in what follows I focus specifically on epistemological differences between the two traditions.

3. Equipollence

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We have seen that a Pyrrhonist suspends judgment on a given question in virtue of finding equipollent *arguments* in favor of contrary answers to that question. On a dominant and long-standing interpretation of Pyrrhonism, however, the equipollence that prompts suspension (*epochê*) is more pervasive than this. According to many interpreters, Pyrrhonists find *all impressions* equipollent.[29] Indeed, this is often cited as a key difference between Pyrrhonism and New Academic skepticism.[30] Consider the following claim from Striker's influential article comparing the two:

However, the Pyrrhonists distanced themselves from the stoicizing Academics in that they insisted that they regarded all appearances as equipollent, whereas the Academics, according to the Carneadean theory of plausible, tested, and unimpeded impressions, certainly did not follow any dogmas, but did assess their impressions by giving different weight to different impressions, and holding some as more likely to be true than others.[31]

Although Striker "reconsiders" the relationship between Pyrrhonism and Academic skepticism in a later paper, she still maintains that "the Pyrrhonists go a step further [than the Academics]: they reject even the modest appeal to greater or lesser plausibility and refuse to discriminate among impressions in any way."[32]

This understanding of Pyrrhonism is based on a number of passages that may seem to suggest that Pyrrhonists do not discriminate among impressions at all. The strongest such passage comes in Sextus's comparison of Pyrrhonism to the New Academy:

> **T4** Further, we say that impressions are equal in convincingness and lack of convincingness (as far as the argument goes), while they say that some are plausible [*pithanê*] and others implausible [*apithanos*].
>
> (*PH* 1.227)

This interpretation may also seem attractive in that, as we saw, one of Aenesidemus's chief complaints with New Academic skepticism was its positing of the plausible impression. If Pyrrhonists find all impressions to be equipollent, this is a clear departure from the New Academy, since on this account no impression will be more plausible than any other.

I think that this interpretation is mistaken, however, or at least potentially misleading, and that getting clear on the sense in which Pyrrhonists disavow plausible impressions will help sharpen the actual contrast between Pyrrhonian and New Academic skepticism. Note that Sextus does not say that Pyrrhonists find impressions equally convincing and unconvincing unqualifiedly, but rather "as far as the argument goes." This qualification, which we saw also attaches to the way in which Pyrrhonists suspend judgment, suggests that there is a sense in which Pyrrhonists say that impressions are *not* equally convincing and unconvincing; I return to this point in §4.

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More generally, if Pyrrhonists do not discriminate among their impressions *in any way*, they cannot lay claim to a special ability to produce opposed arguments *of equal strength*. That is, if they find all impressions equally

convincing, all they would need to do to produce an equipollent argument in the face of an argument for P would be to produce an argument—any argument—for P*. In fact, they would not even need to produce an opposed *argument*, even in the loose sense of argument with which (as we saw) Sextus operates, since a bare assertion of P* would suffice (so long as it generated the impression that *P**). But everyone is able to assert P* in the face of an argument for P. Possessing such an ability would not distinguish Pyrrhonists from anyone, let alone from other philosophers. Sextus also explicitly says that not all arguments are of equal strength. In the final chapter of the *Outlines* (*PH* 3.280–1), he notes that Pyrrhonists pursue their argumentative practice because they are lovers of humanity (*philanthrôpoi*) who aim to cure others of their dogmatic rashness (*propeteia*). And just as doctors use drugs of differing strength to treat differing degrees of illness, Pyrrhonists use arguments of differing strength to treat differing degrees of rashness. For those whose dogmatic commitments run deep, strong arguments are needed; for others, weaker arguments may suffice. All of this requires, however, that Pyrrhonists discriminate among their impressions and do not find them all equally convincing.

Accordingly, in **T4** Sextus cannot straightforwardly mean that all impressions that arise in virtue of considering an argument are equally convincing. What, then, does he mean to claim? I think that the best interpretation is the following. Consider any issue that might come up for investigation—Sextus has just mentioned, for example, differences between Pyrrhonist and New Academic attitudes to the question whether there is anything that is good by nature (*PH* 1.226). For any argument in favor of there being a good by nature, Pyrrhonists can construct an equally convincing argument in favor of there not being a good by nature. Thus, the arguments on each side and, so, the impressions had as far as the arguments go, are balanced overall. This does not mean that any argument picked from one side will be equipollent to any argument picked from the other side. Rather, it means that any argument picked from one side is matched by an equally convincing argument on the other side. On the whole, then, the scales balance between there being a good by nature and there not being a good by nature. Sextus's report that "impressions are equal in convincingness and lack of convincingness (as far as the argument goes)," then, reflects the Pyrrhonists' all-things-considered report of their investigative experience on every issue. He does not mean that Pyrrhonists refuse to discriminate among their impressions in any way.[33]

As Sextus understands it, this distinguishes Pyrrhonists from the New Academics. New Academics sometimes find that upon careful consideration of an issue the overall argumentative balance favors one side. It does not do so in such a way that they can claim to have established the truth. But, unlike Pyrrhonists, they do not find their intellect left "at a standstill." They are aware that they do not have conclusive grounds for affirming P, but they may report finding the impression that P to be more plausible than the impression that P*, on the basis of the arguments they have considered.[34]

Some scholars allege that Sextus's analysis of the definition of skepticism requires that there is some sense in which Pyrrhonists find all arguments equipollent.[35] The relevant text, which we considered piecemeal in §2, reads in full as follows:

> **T5** By "opposed arguments" we do not necessarily have in mind affirmation and negation, but take the phrase simply in the sense of "conflicting." By "equipollence" we mean equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing: none of the conflicting arguments takes precedence over any other as being more convincing.
>
> (*PH* 1.10)

It might seem that the last sentence effectively means that all conflicting arguments strike skeptics as equipollent. However, it is possible to take this to mean that none of the conflicting arguments that have been produced by exercising the skeptical ability takes precedence with respect to convincingness. This does not

require that skeptics find no opposed arguments, let alone no arguments whatsoever, to take precedence with respect to convincingness.

4. Assent

Since, upon reflection, Pyrrhonists find any reason for assenting to a given impression equally balanced by a reason to assent to a conflicting impression, it would seem that they should never assent to any impression. Moreover, Sextus's characterization of skepticism as an ability whose exercise leads to suspension of judgment may seem to entail that skeptics always suspend judgment and, so, never assent.

Sextus, however, repeatedly says that Pyrrhonists assent. Here are a few examples:

> **T6** Skeptics assent to the states that are forced upon us so far as impressions are concerned.
>
> (*PH* 1.13)

> **T7** As we said before, we do not overturn anything which leads us, without our willing it, to assent in accordance with a passive impression.
>
> (*PH* 1.19)

> **T8** Remember too that we say we neither posit nor reject anything which is said dogmatically about what is unclear; for we do yield to things which passively move us and lead us necessarily to assent.
>
> (*PH* 1.193) ↳

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> **T9** Recollective signs are found convincing in everyday life: seeing smoke, someone diagnoses fire; having observed a scar, he says that a wound was inflicted. Hence not only do we not conflict with everyday life, but we actually join the struggle on its side, assenting *adoxastôs* to what it has found convincing and taking a stand against the private fictions of the Dogmatists.
>
> (*PH* 2.102)

T6–8 report that Pyrrhonists assent only when they find themselves forced to assent. **T9** tells us that Pyrrhonists assent *adoxastôs*, a word typically translated as "without belief" or "without opinions" but which I think is better rendered as "undogmatically" for reasons I give in §5. **T9** also says that Pyrrhonists assent to what everyday life "has found convincing" (*pepisteumenô(i)*), confirming our suspicion that there is a sense in which Pyrrhonists find impressions convincing. On balance, then, it would seem that Pyrrhonists do conceive of themselves as assenting to impressions when, in some sense, they are forced to do so.[36]

To understand the scope of Pyrrhonist assent and the sense in which Pyrrhonists take it to be forced, let us consider some of the examples Sextus gives of the content of impressions to which Pyrrhonists assent. (Each example is controversial. Indeed, expressing the impressions' content with the verb "to be" as opposed to "to appear" is controversial. I defend this choice in the following discussion.)

> P1** «I am heated» (1.13)
>
> P2** «honey is sweet» (1.19–20)
>
> P3** «there is fire over there» (2.102)
>
> P4** «piety is good, impiety bad» (1.24)

> P5** «numbers exist» (3.151)

In certain circumstances, a Pyrrhonist can find themselves not merely having but assenting to impressions with such content. Let us consider the proposition «honey is sweet». If a person, in normal conditions, tastes honey they will form the impression that *honey is sweet*, and the natural result is that they will assent to it. Assent is, as it were, the default response in such circumstances. In the absence of reasons for withholding one's assent, there can be no basis for intervention in this natural process.

As we have seen, however, whenever Pyrrhonists turn their attention to *arguments* they report encountering equipollence. Suppose, for example, they get involved in arguing about whether honey is sweet—perhaps rival philosophers are debating whether sweetness is a genuine feature of the world or drawing attention to the fact that honey appears not to be sweet in *abnormal* circumstances. In the course of their investigations, they find that each argument on one side is balanced by an equally compelling argument on the other. If that is their
p. 624 experience, they will not take themselves ↳ to have all-things-considered reason to believe that *honey is sweet*. It might be tempting to say that they should thus give up that belief. But they have also not acquired any all-things-considered-reason to give it up. For this circumstance to strike them as sufficient reason to *withdraw* their naturally occurring assent, they would need to have further commitments as to the circumstances under which one ought (or ought not) to assent; but it is hard to see how Pyrrhonists could acquire such commitments. It is possible, then, that Pyrrhonists find themselves unable to avoid assent to the impression that *honey is sweet* since they have not yet found a reason to avoid it, and since further argument does not appear to yield such a reason.

Sextus himself explicitly compares Pyrrhonists to New Academics on this issue. Before looking at his comparison, I want to review briefly the evolution of Academic views on assent.[37] Arcesilaus argued that positing assent is superfluous in accounting for human action, since humans, like other animals, can act as a result of impressions giving rise to impulses, without any intervening assents.[38] Although Arcesilaus proposes this theory to respond to the inaction (*apraxia*) objection, Sextus could take it to apply in cases of assent to theoretical propositions as well (as Carneades's notion of approval does). Carneades, dissatisfied with Arcesilaus's proposal, maintained that there is a kind of positive mental reaction someone could have to an impression that does not count as assent in the Stoic sense.[39] Carneades called this mental reaction "approval" and maintained that it is sufficient to operate in both theoretical and practical contexts.

Pyrrhonists, then, do not side with Arcesilaus insofar as they do not conceive of themselves as never assenting to impressions. But they also do not side with the New Academics insofar as they do not carve out a distinct *kind* of mental reaction that Pyrrhonists can permissibly have to impressions. Rather, they seem to identify a particular *way* in which Pyrrhonists assent, namely, by being forced.

Some interpreters argue that the notion of forced assent would be unintelligible to the Stoics. The Stoics were emphatic that assent depends on us (it is *eph' hêmin*) and is voluntary (*hekousion*).[40,41] Consider the following passage from Sextus:

> **T10** Well then, cognition is, as one can hear from [Stoics], assent to a cognitive impression—which seems to be a twofold affair, and to have one part that is involuntary, another that is voluntary and that depends on our own judgment. For having impressions is unwilled, and it does not depend on the person affected, but on the thing producing the impressions, that he is so disposed—for example, whitely when the color white impinges on him, or sweetly when something sweet is brought to his sense of taste; but assenting to this movement does depend on the person receiving the impression.
>
> (*M* 8.397, trans. modified from Bett; cf. Cicero *Ac.* 40)

Given such passages, some interpreters have suggested that the Pyrrhonists endorse a sort of assent that the Stoics would not recognize as such.[42]

However, if the Pyrrhonist's forced assent is as I described it, it is something that the Stoics would count as
p. 625 assent. It is important to note that, on the Stoic picture, assent is ↳ similarly the ordinary, default response: absent some interference, such as from conflicting background beliefs, the mind assents naturally to impressions.[43] For example, if you form the impression that *the wall is red*, you will assent to that impression unless you have certain background beliefs that conflict with it, such as that *the ambient lighting is red* and that *red ambient lighting can make white walls look red*. Accordingly, the Stoics could likewise classify cases such as those I described earlier as cases of assent.[44] As for the supposed conflict between the Pyrrhonist claim that assent may be forced and the Stoic claim that assent depends on us, the Stoics suppose that something depends on us just in case, when it occurs, its occurrence does not depend on anything external to us. It is true that the occurrence of an impression partly depends on external conditions—on an external object that produces the impression—as **T10** makes clear. Whether we assent to an impression that has been formed, however, depends solely on our psychological makeup. In particular, it depends on how well the impression coheres with our other beliefs and impressions.[45] Thus, in saying that Pyrrhonists assent when they are forced to do so, Sextus is not invoking a notion of assent that the Stoics would find incoherent.

We can now look at Sextus's characterization of the difference between Pyrrhonism and New Academicism on this issue:

> **T11** Even if both Academics and Skeptics say that they go along with [or "are convinced by": *peithesthai*] certain things, the difference even here between the two philosophies is clear. For "go along with" is used in different senses. It means not resisting but simply following without strong inclination or adherence (as a boy is said to go along with his chaperon); and it sometimes means assenting to something by choice and, as it were, sympathy (as a dissolute man goes along with someone who urges extravagant living). Hence, since Carneades and Clitomachus say that they go along with things and that some things are plausible in the sense of having a strong wish and with a strong inclination, whereas we say so in the sense of simply yielding without adherence, in this respect too we differ from them.
>
> (*PH* 1.229–30)

As Sextus sees it, in maintaining that it is permissible to go along with plausible impressions, New Academics take themselves to have reasons to approve certain impressions. They acknowledge that those reasons are not conclusive, but they take their response to be better supported by reasons than other possible responses. Pyrrhonists, on the other hand, simply find themselves going along with some impressions as the result of natural compulsion, while also finding that any line of reasoning that supports that response is equally balanced by some line of reasoning against it. Sextus's analogies seem apt: a boy is merely caused by his chaperone to act a certain way; the dissolute man, however, takes himself to have some reason to think he is doing what should be done. Sextus might be overstating the point when he says that the Academics "have a strong wish and a strong inclination," but we can understand why it might seem this way to a Pyrrhonist.

p. 626 Pyrrhonists, then, find themselves sometimes assenting to impressions as a result of natural compulsion but never assenting to impressions as a result of considering arguments. I turn to the question whether this results in their having any beliefs in §5.

5. Beliefs

One of the most debated topics concerning Pyrrhonism is whether it is consistent with the possession of beliefs: so-called rustic interpretations answer "no," while urbane interpretations answer "yes."[46] Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the approach I have adopted thus far, I favor an urbane interpretation.

Recall Sextus's report in **T2** that "the chief constitutive principle of Skepticism is the claim that to every account an equal account is opposed; for it is from this, we think, that we come not to *dogmatizein*" (*PH* 1.12).[47] Sextus, however, immediately qualifies the report that Pyrrhonists do not *dogmatizein*:

> **T12** When we say that [Pyrrhonists] do not *dogmatizein*, we do not take *dogma* in that sense in which some say, quite generally, that *dogma* is acquiescing in something; for [Pyrrhonists] assent to the states that are forced upon us so far as impressions are concerned—for example, they would not say, when heated or chilled, "I think I am not heated (or: chilled)." Rather, we say that they do not *dogmatizein* in the sense in which some say that *dogma* is assent to some non-evident matter of investigation in the sciences; for Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything non-evident.
>
> (*PH* 1.13)

Sextus here distinguishes two kinds of *dogmata*, one of which Pyrrhonists will possess, one of which they will not. I follow recent tradition in referring to the latter as "philosophico-scientific" *dogmata*.

According to some interpreters, what makes a *dogma* philosophico-scientific is its propositional content: if the relevant proposition refers to non-evident items—paradigmatically the kinds of items that figure in philosophical theories (e.g., atoms, void, forms, Forms, criteria of truth) —it is a philosophico-scientific *dogma*.[48] Alternatively, some interpreters think that what matters is not the content of the *dogma* but the way in which the *dogma* is acquired: if acquired through considering arguments or reasons or evidence in favor of it, it is a philosophico-scientific *dogma*. On the latter view, almost any proposition can, in principle, be the content of a philosophico-scientific *dogma*, because almost any proposition *can* be accepted in such a way. Thus, on the latter interpretation, a proposition's being a possible object of assent for a Pyrrhonist is not an absolute but a relative matter.[49]

I think that the latter interpretation is correct. If we recall that the purpose of **T12** is to qualify the sense in
p. 627 which equipollence in opposed arguments leads Pyrrhonists ↳ not to *dogmatizein*, it is natural to take **T12** to be noting that many *dogmata* are not acquired via argumentation. Assenting to a non-evident matter for investigation in the sciences is assenting to P on the basis of argumentation; assenting to states that are forced upon one so far as impressions are concerned is assenting to P in the forced way I described earlier. If we were to interpret the distinction between kinds of *dogmata* in line with the alternative interpretation, Sextus must think that either (a) there are only arguments concerning items that figure in philosophical theories or (b) such arguments—i.e., arguments about non-philosophical matters—fall outside the skeptical ability to marshal equipollent arguments. Neither seems attractive to me.

So, non-philosophico-scientific *dogmata* are assents caused simply by the world striking a subject a certain way, and not because the subject has considered any reasons for assenting. What can their content be? **T12** is naturally read as saying that Pyrrhonists will (in certain circumstances) assent to the impression that *I am heated* resulting in the *dogma* that *I am heated*. Some interpreters reject this reading by noting that Sextus tells us only what Pyrrhonists will *not* say when heated, and nothing about what they will say.[50] The purpose of the example, however, is to illustrate the sense in which Pyrrhonists assent, and so there must be *something* to which Sextus thinks the Pyrrhonist assents. And I cannot see what it could be other than to the impression that *I am heated*.[51]

T12 might (on its own) seem to suggest a rather limited range for permissible *dogmata*. However, as we saw from the list in §5, Pyrrhonists can find themselves in circumstances in which they are forced to assent to the impression that *honey is sweet*, that *piety is good*, *impiety bad*, that *there is fire over there*, that *numbers exist* and, so, will have *dogmata* with such content. As we will see in §6, some such *dogmata* guide Pyrrhonists' behavior. Thus, I think it is clear that such *dogmata* are beliefs.[52]

Why do some interpreters reject this view? One reason might be Sextus's repeated use of the adverb "*adoxastôs*" to characterize Pyrrhonian philosophical practice and life. We saw in **T9** that Sextus says Pyrrhonists assent *adoxastôs*; he also says they utter skeptical phrases (*PH* 1.15), act in accordance with everyday observances (*PH* 1.23), and, more generally, live *adoxastôs* (*PH* 1.231). The word "*adoxastôs*" means quite literally "non-doxastically," and many interpreters take Sextus's use of it to indicate that everything the Pyrrhonist does involves no *doxai*.[53] Since many interpreters take *doxa* to amount to belief (or opinion), they take Sextus's use of "*adoxastôs*" to be effectively an explicit report that Pyrrhonists do not possess any beliefs (or opinions).

I think this is the wrong way to understand Sextus's use of "*adoxastôs*."[54] He first uses the term shortly after **T12**'s distinction between two kinds of *dogmata*. Having distinguished permissible from impermissible *dogmata*, Sextus immediately says the following:

> **T13** Not even in uttering the skeptical phrases about unclear matters—for example, "In no way more," or "I determine nothing," or one of the other phrases which we shall later discuss—do they
> p. 628 *dogmatizein* ... The main point is this: ↳ in uttering these phrases they say what appears to them and report their own feelings *adoxastôs*, affirming nothing about external objects.
>
> (*PH* 1.14–15)

In **T13**, Sextus heads off a potential objection: since Pyrrhonists utter certain phrases as a result of argumentation, don't these phrases indicate assent to some non-evident matter? Although the details are complicated, for our purposes the crucial point is that Sextus insists that Pyrrhonists utter the phrases "*adoxastôs*." I think it is clear, then, that Sextus's use of this word is meant to be anaphoric on the distinction between the two kinds of *dogma* and means, in effect, not "without belief (or opinion)" but rather "without (impermissible) *dogma*." Thus, I think we should understand Sextus's use of "*adoxastôs*" to mean "undogmatically" (as Inwood and Gerson indeed translate it), and so to report that Pyrrhonists philosophize and live without the impermissible *dogmata* described in **T12**.[55]

The main philosophical support for a rustic interpretation of Pyrrhonism comes from the Pyrrhonist's attitude toward the existence of criteria of truth.[56] Since Pyrrhonists suspend judgment whether criteria of truth exist, this argument holds, they possess no criterion whereby they can discriminate between their impressions. But discriminating between impressions is held to be a necessary condition for judging that the world is a certain way, which, in turn, is a necessary condition for believing the world is a certain way. Given that this argument is meant to rule out possession of anything that can be appropriately called a belief, philosophers who accept it must interpret the kind of *dogmata* that Pyrrhonists can possess as not amounting to beliefs. On Barnes's interpretation, they are akin to Wittgensteinian "avowals"; on Burnyeat's, they are acknowledgments that one is in a mental state, which (for complicated reasons I discuss later in this chapter) Burnyeat thinks do not count as beliefs.

I shall briefly raise several points against this sort of interpretation.[57] First, criteria of truth are meant to secure the possibility of a special class of beliefs (roughly, beliefs that count as knowledge), and not to secure the possibility of forming beliefs in the first place. Second, and more importantly, we must distinguish possessing criteria of truth from having or lacking beliefs about whether criteria of truth exist. One can lack any beliefs concerning the existence of criteria of truth (say, in virtue of suspending judgment concerning their existence) yet still possess and, indeed, employ criteria of truth. For example, the Stoics held the cognitive impression to be a criterion of truth. The Stoics think that such impressions result from the normal operation of our cognitive powers in normal circumstances.[58] Suspending judgment whether there are cognitive impressions does not, for the Stoics, result in one's cognitive faculties operating any differently and, so, would not result in someone's being unable to form cognitive impressions.

A final point: I noted that Burnyeat has complicated reasons for taking Pyrrhonist acknowledgments that one is in a mental state not to amount to beliefs. According to Burnyeat, in the Greek tradition the objects of belief

were restricted to propositions that concern publicly available objective reality.[59] Thus, acknowledgments that
p. 629 one is in a ↳ certain subjective state, since they do not concern something publicly available, cannot be beliefs. Some interpreters of Pyrrhonism interpret permissible *dogmata* more or less as Burnyeat does but reject his reasons for thinking that they do not count as beliefs.[60] In particular, such interpreters claim that Pyrrhonists assent to propositions about how things *appear* to them, rather than to propositions about how things *are*. So, as I noted earlier, such interpreters object to my contention that Pyrrhonists assent to propositions such as «honey is sweet», insisting instead that they assent to propositions such as «honey appears sweet». Thus, they claim, Pyrrhonists do not believe that *honey is sweet* but only that *honey appears sweet*.

This is a subtle interpretation, and space permits only a brief response to what I take to be its best piece of support, which comes in Sextus's response to the charge that Pyrrhonists overturn (*anairein*) what is apparent:

> **T14** When we investigate whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that [*hoti*] they appear, and what we investigate is not what is apparent but what is said about what is apparent—and this is different from investigating what is apparent itself. For example, it appears to us that honey sweetens (we concede this inasmuch as we are sweetened in a perceptual way); but whether (as far as the argument goes) it is actually sweet is something we investigate—and this is not what is apparent but something said about what is apparent.
>
> (*PH* 1.19–20)

Many interpreters take the phrase "we grant that they appear" (*to men hoti phainetai didomen*) to be an explicit statement that the propositions to which Pyrrhonists assent concern how things appear. However, as Morison argues, it is entirely possible to take "*hoti*" to mean "because" and to understand Sextus as saying that it is because of how things appear that Pyrrhonists assent to propositions about how things are.[61] So, for example, it is because honey appears sweet that they assent to the proposition «honey is sweet». Thus, we do not have to understand Pyrrhonists as restricted only to beliefs about how things appear to them.

6. Action

Like the Academics, Pyrrhonists faced the objection that their philosophical practice is incompatible with acting. We can understand Academic responses as having two broad components. First (as I have mentioned earlier), they maintained that even without assent, at least as the Stoics conceive of assent, Academics could intentionally get their bodies up and moving. Second, they maintained that even though there are no criteria of *truth*, there are *practical* criteria by which Academics can regulate their behavior and attain happiness (*eudaimonia*).[62]

p. 630 Although Sextus does not explicitly break down his response into these components, we can understand it as also having one part concerning the psychology of action and one part about criteria of action: first, as we saw, Pyrrhonists do assent to impressions; second, Sextus identifies several "everyday observances" which enable Pyrrhonists to be active. To understand this in more detail, let's first consider Sextus's explicit response to the inactivity (*anenergêsia*) objection:

> **T15** Hence one also needs to look down on those who think that [the Pyrrhonist] is reduced to inactivity … because, since the whole of life is bound up with choices and avoidances, the person who neither chooses nor avoids anything in effect renounces life and stays fixed like some vegetable … In saying this, of course, they do not understand that the skeptic does not live in accordance with philosophical argument (for as far as this is concerned he is inactive), but that in accordance with non-philosophical practice he is able to choose some things and avoid others.

> (*M* 11.162–6; tr. Bett, modified)

Our discussion so far should make it clear in what sense Pyrrhonists live in accordance with non-philosophical practice rather than philosophical argument. Sextus cannot mean that Pyrrhonists do not *engage* in philosophical argument.[63] Rather, he means that Pyrrhonists never act on the basis of a philosophical argument to the effect that they should act a certain way. If the question whether they should Φ arises, Pyrrhonists will marshal arguments for and against Φ-ing and, upon finding such arguments equipollent, suspend judgment whether they should Φ. Nevertheless, just like ordinary, non-philosophical people, Pyrrhonists sometimes find themselves forced to assent to impressions and, as a result, just like ordinary, non-philosophical people, Pyrrhonists can act.

Sextus's response to the inactivity objection connects to the Pyrrhonian "criterion of acting" (*kritêrion tou prassein*). Sextus tells us that, "attending to what is apparent, that is, to impressions, we live undogmatically in accordance with everyday observances—for we are not able to be utterly inactive" (*PH* 1.23). According to Sextus, there are four such kinds of everyday observance:

> **T16** By nature's guidance we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking. By the necessitation of feelings, hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink. By the handing down of customs and laws, we accept, from an everyday point of view, that piety is good and impiety bad. By teaching of kinds of expertise, we are not inactive in those that we accept.
>
> (*PH* 1.24)

Just in virtue of being equipped with certain cognitive powers, then, Pyrrhonists are able to perceive and think. If someone objects that Pyrrhonists cannot eat or drink, Sextus contends that in virtue of being hungry and thirsty, Pyrrhonists will eat and drink. More ↳ robustly, and more controversially, Sextus says that Pyrrhonists "accept, from an everyday point of view, that piety is good and impiety bad." So, insofar as a Pyrrhonist is raised in a culture where, say, sacrificing is viewed as good and blasphemy as bad, the Pyrrhonist will assent to the impression that sacrificing is good and blasphemy is bad, and so will sacrifice and not blaspheme. Last, Sextus says that Pyrrhonists can adopt an expertise (*technê*) and so be active in accordance with it. Sextus himself was a doctor, after all. Thus, Sextus presents Pyrrhonism as compatible not merely with simple activities, but with a range of rather complicated activities.

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7. Conclusion: The Possibility of Pyrrhonism

As we saw, Pyrrhonism originated from dissatisfaction with the development of Academic philosophy, starting primarily with Carneades. We also saw that much of that development was spurred by the objection that one could not act if they wholeheartedly followed the philosophical practice of Arcesilaus. Upholding Pyrrhonism as a possible life for a human being to live is, thus, of the utmost importance to the Pyrrhonian enterprise. In §6, we considered Sextus's explicit response to the objection that Pyrrhonists cannot act. In closing, I want to consider a related objection according to which it is impossible for human beings to have the attitude toward their impressions that Pyrrhonists report having.

According to Myles Burnyeat, "the ultimate incoherence" of Pyrrhonism resides in its advocating a "thoroughgoing detachment from oneself." He understands Pyrrhonists to be detached from themselves because, "[w]hen a thing appears in a certain light to [a skeptic], that no more inclines him to believe it is as it appears than would the fact of its so appearing to someone else. It is merely one more impression or appearance to be noted."[64] Striker likewise characterizes the Pyrrhonist as someone who " 'go[es] along' with the beliefs he finds himself having without reflection, taking as it were the attitude of a neutral observer even to his own inclinations."[65]

Animating Burnyeat's and Striker's objection, of course, is a version of the idea that Pyrrhonists do not discriminate among their impressions, which I have argued is mistaken. However, I want to make explicit something that has been in the background of the discussion thus far. There is a crucial, though unfortunately often unnoticed, difference between impressions not in any way inclining someone to believe something and impressions inclining someone to believe something *but being equally matched by* impressions that incline them to an incompatible belief. Pyrrhonists, as I understand them, are in the latter position. They are not people who feel no pull to believe that the world is as it appears to them to be. In fact, they do feel such a pull. But whenever they investigate an issue diligently, open-mindedly, and honestly, they find themselves pulled
p. 632 equally strongly in incompatible directions. Far from being detached from themselves, ↳ they would insist that they are honest that the world appears to them in incompatible ways and honest that they have yet not been able to reconcile or explain away those incompatibilities. They do not do what they see so many people around them doing, namely settling on a view and becoming insensitive to the strength of competing views. They call the people they see doing this "dogmatists," in the sense that has now become pejorative.[66]

Notes

1. Allen, Bett, Long, and Sedley present various elements of this history in their chapters. See Dorandi 1999 for the chronology of this period.

2. DL 4.28; cf. Cicero *De Or*. 3.67, *DND* 1.11, and *De Fin*. 2.2.

3. Considerable debate surrounds whether Arcesilaus adopted philosophical positions in at least some sense (for discussion and references, see Brittain 2008; see also Allen, this volume).

4. Sextus Empiricus *M* 7.151–5; Cicero *Luc*. 112–13. For discussion, see Caston, this volume.

5. Cicero *Luc*. 67.

6. I discuss skeptical responses to the inaction objection in detail in Schwab 2020.

7. On the question of Carneades's philosophical motives, see Bett, this volume.

8. See Brittain 2001 for discussion of Philo.

9. Aenesidemus was not alone: Antiochus, another of Philo's students, also broke off and founded his own, broadly syncretic, philosophical movement. See Allen 2018.

10. Photius *Biblio.* 212, 170a17–2 < LS 71C, my translation.

11. Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* xi 5.6.

12. Barnes 2000: xi–xii. We also have a less detailed presentation of Pyrrhonism by Diogenes Laertius.

13. Sextus registers caution about identifying the Middle Academy and Pyrrhonism, but on the basis of interpretations of Arcesilaus that he does not explicitly endorse (*PH* 1.233–4). Sextus also identifies the "Old Academy" of Plato and says, "some add a fourth, the Academy of Philo and Charmadas, and some reckon as a fifth the Academy of Antiochus" (*PH* 1.220; trans. of *PH* are modified from Annas and Barnes unless otherwise noted).

14. Or, perhaps, to *interpretations* of Carneades by the subsequent Academics; I owe this point to Richard Bett.

15. As Frede 1979: 5 notes, Sextus, on whom I focus, is decidedly circumspect about the historical Pyrrho's importance to understanding Pyrrhonism (*PH* 1.7). For discussion of Pyrrho, see Bett 2000 and Long, this volume. Striker 2010: 197 suggests that by "choosing Pyrrho as their figurehead, the Sceptics, thus, emphasized the importance of tranquility and presented themselves as competitors to the dogmatic schools of philosophy." I consider the role of tranquility (*ataraxia*) in Pyrrhonism later in the chapter.

16. In the intervening sections, Sextus elucidates various elements of this definition. I discuss those elucidations in a moment.

17. In **T1** Sextus says that skepticism is an ability to oppose *logoi* and items (*pragmata*). Although the language of opposing items runs through Sextus, in elucidating the definition in *PH* 1.9–10 he focuses on *logoi* and I follow suit.

p. 633 18. Morison 2011: 272–4 asserts both points I make here, but without the textual support I provide.

19. It is unclear from Sextus's language whether Skepticism is the specific ability to oppose equipollent arguments or the more general ability to oppose arguments (I thank Justin Vlasits for pressing this question). I will proceed as if the former reading is correct; for even if Skeptics are distinguished from non-Skeptics by possessing a well-honed general ability to produce opposed arguments, the most important manifestation of that ability is in the production of opposed equipollent arguments.

20. For present purposes we can ignore further qualifications that will likely be needed, such as that the assertions be internally consistent.

21. Morison 2011: 292.

22. Here and throughout, we must bear in mind Sextus's programmatic statement that "on none of the matters to be discussed do we affirm that things certainly are just as we say they are: rather we report descriptively on each item according to how it appears to us at the time" (1.4). Thus, although I follow Sextus in speaking of skeptics as producing equipollent arguments, this is shorthand for producing arguments that *appear* equipollent to skeptics at the time they are considered.

23. For debate over how the modes operate so as to induce suspension of judgment, see Annas and Barnes 1985, Hankinson 1995, Morison 2011; 2018; 2019, and Nawar 2022.

24. For discussion of this phrase, see Frede 1979: 10–12 and Brunschwig 1990.

25. Friedman 2017: 302, who takes inspiration from Sextus, argues that "one is inquiring into some matter if and only if one is suspended on the matter."

26. See, e.g., 3.29 (cf. Nawar 2022, 541, to whom I owe the reference).

27. This is the force of Sextus's analogizing the skeptic's attaining tranquility to the painter Apelles, who repeatedly tried and failed to paint the lather on a horse's mouth and, flinging his sponge at the canvas in frustration, produced a representation of the horse's lather (1.28).

28. See esp. Striker 2010.

29. A less extreme version, defended by Machuca 2009, maintains that skeptics find all *arguments* equipollent. I consider this version at the end of this section.

30. It is also where Burnyeat (and others) locate the supposed "ultimate incoherence" of Pyrrhonism. I consider this issue in my conclusion.

31. Striker 1981: 145.

32. Striker 2010: 204. Cf. Burnyeat 1980: 41, Vogt 2012, 654, note 30, and Thorsrud 2018: 58. On Carneades's appeal to plausible impressions, see Bett, this volume (who refers to them as "persuasive impressions").

33. When Striker says that Pyrrhonists "refuse to discriminate among impressions in any way" she may have in mind such an all-things-considered report. If so, I think her claim is misleading rather than false. However, I suspect that she intends the stronger view because, as we will see in the conclusion, she characterizes Pyrrhonists in a way that presupposes it.

34. For discussion, see Bett, this volume Sextus is not wildly off the mark here. Cicero reports that "when questioned on either side" (i.e., in argumentative contexts) New Academics will respond with "yes" or "no" on the basis of what strikes them as plausible (*Luc*. 104). The Cicero passage also characterizes the plausible impression as a criterion of action, which I discuss later.

35. See Machuca 2009: 115–16.

p. 634 36. Sextus also characterizes the positive reaction Pyrrhonists can have to impressions as "acquiescing" (*eudokein*) (1.13) and

"following" (*peithesthai*) (1.229).

37. See Schwab 2020 for fuller discussion.

38. Plutarch *Ad*. *Col*. (1122B7–D2). For discussion, see Allen, this volume.

39. Cicero *Luc*. 104. For discussion, see Striker 1980, Frede 1984, Bett 1990 and Bett, this volume, Obdrzalek 2006, and Thorsrud 2018.

40. E.g., Vogt 2010: 174; cf. Vogt 2012: 661 and Fine 2000: 87 and 99.

41. Sextus Empiricus *M.* 8.397; cf. Cicero *Ac.* 40.

42. E.g., Vogt 2010: 174; cf. Vogt 2012: 661 and Fine 2000: 87 and 99.

43. This is seen most easily by the fact that the Stoics analogized the mechanics of assent to the working of a scale (Cicero *Luc*. 38; Plutarch *Ad*. *Col*. 1122C, *On Moral Virtue* 447A, and *DSR* 1045C; cf. Epictetus *Discourses* 2.12). When an impression is "put on the scale" (i.e., formed) it inclines the mind to assent, and the mind will assent in the absence of countervailing "weights" (i.e., countervailing beliefs). For discussion of the scale-model, see Brittain 2014: §2 and Shogry (unpublished).

44. See Lorenz 2011: 197–202 for argument that Chrysippus did in fact acknowledge this sort of assent.

45. I take this to be the significance of Chrysippus's famous, if cryptic, cylinder and cone image (see Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* 7.2 and Cicero *De Fato* 39–44). Whether a cylinder or cone is struck—which corresponds to the mind forming an impression—does not depend solely on what each is like, since there must be an external striker. But the manner in which each moves *upon* being struck—which corresponds to the mind either assenting or not—does depend solely on what each is like. See Bobzien 1998 for authoritative discussion of the Stoic conceptions of determinism and freedom; see Meyer, this volume.

46. The language is due to Barnes 1982, 61, note 14. For the classic debate over this issue, see the papers collected in Burnyeat and Frede 1998. For more recent discussion, see Fine 2000, Striker 2001, Perin 2010, Vogt 2012, Schwab 2013, and Morison 2019.

47. Since what is at issue is how to understand "*dogma*" (plural "*dogmata*") and "*dogmatizein*," I use transliterations.

48. In this paragraph I closely follow Morison's taxonomy 2011: 265–7.

49. See Frede 1979: 22–4.

50. Indeed, Barnes 1982: 75 alleges Pyrrhonists will say nothing in such circumstances.

51. See Fine 2000: 99–100 for further argument against Barnes on this point.

52. As Fine notes 2000: 81, there are two aspects to this debate: (1) what is the nature of the *dogmata* Pyrrhonists possess and (2) do such *dogmata* deserve to be called beliefs? I think that one would need a highly idiosyncratic conception of belief to deny that permissible *dogmata*, as I understand them, are beliefs.

53. See, e.g., Burnyeat 1980: 47 and Vogt 2012: 652.

54. Here I agree with Fine 2000, 100, note 65 and Morison 2019.

55. We might have expected Sextus to employ "*adogmatikôs*" as the opposite to his frequent adverbial term "*dogmatikôs*." However, "*adogmatikôs*" does not seem to be a Greek word. (Indeed, the earliest extant occurrence of *any* word formed from the root *dogma* and the alpha privative is from the fourth century CE.)

56. Burnyeat calls the "skeptic's inability to find an intellectually satisfying criterion" "the real backbone of the discussion" over whether Pyrrhonists can possess beliefs. Barnes 1982: 77–8 presents the argument I consider and Burnyeat 1984: 114–16 presents what he calls a "generalization" of it.

p. 635 57. See Schwab 2013 for more detail.

58. Cicero *Luc*. 19; Sextus Empiricus *M.* 7.424. See also Caston, this volume.

59. See Burnyeat 1980: 47–53 and Burnyeat 1982.

60. See Fine 2000 and Perin 2010.

61. Morison 2019, §3.4.

62. Allen, this volume, Bett, this volume, and Wynne, this volume.

63. Cf. Machuca 2009: 120.

64. Burnyeat 1980: 41–2.

65. Striker 2010: 205.

66. For very helpful discussion and comments, I would like to thank Richard Bett, the audience at the Ancient Epistemology Work-In-Progress group, and the editors of this volume.

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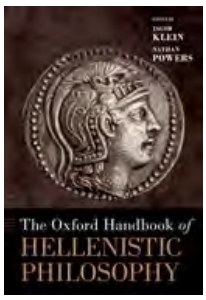
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PART V

EARLY MODERN RECEPTION OF HELLENISTIC PHILOSOPHY



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CHAPTER

28 Early Modern Accounts of Epicureanism

Stewart Duncan, Antonia LoLordo

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Abstract

This chapter explores the early modern influence of ancient Epicureanism, which was both profound and diffuse. It begins with the pivotal figures of Pierre Gassendi and Ralph Cudworth: the former's comprehensive research made the Epicurean system newly accessible to a modern audience and formed a basis for his own physical theory; the latter treated Epicureanism as a dangerous foe in need of extensive refutation. The chapter then surveys three major themes of early modern Epicureanism. First, Epicurean atomism entered the fray of natural philosophy, although modern views of atomic motion tended to differ from ancient accounts. Second, materialism about the human mind, as exemplified in the work of Thomas Hobbes and Julien Offray de la Mettrie, was associated with Epicureanism. Third was the denial of divine providence, explored influentially by Pierre Bayle, Baron d'Holbach, and David Hume, sometimes accompanied by deflationary accounts of religious belief (as in Hobbes).

Keywords: Epicureanism, early modern, Gassendi, Cudworth, Hobbes, La Mettrie, Hume, atomism, materialism, divine providence

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1. Introduction

The early modern influence of Epicureanism was both enormous and diffuse.[1] Many early moderns used the term "Epicurean" to describe other people's views, but they almost never described their own views that way. Moreover, many different sorts of views were called Epicurean. In natural philosophy, identifying someone as an Epicurean often meant that they were an atomist or corpuscularian and that they restricted the properties of corpuscles to size, shape, and motion. Describing someone as Epicurean could also mean that they denied the existence of an incorporeal human soul, that they were an atheist, or that they denied divine providence. Sometimes to be an Epicurean was simply to hold that "Pleasure is the end or felicitie of man"—a view more often criticized than advocated.[2] Indeed, an additional difficulty in sorting out the early modern legacy of Epicureanism is that "Epicurean" was often a term of abuse rather than a description of any particular ideology, let alone a historical position. This is because Epicureanism was associated above all with immorality and the subversion of religion.

The views that early moderns described as Epicurean were, then, quite different from the views found in the works of Epicurus and his followers. Given this, why even use the term "Epicurean"? One answer is simple: the early moderns used it themselves, and they found it an important category as well as a useful slur. Understanding how they used this category helps us understand early modern philosophical debates.

We do not aim at an exhaustive survey of early modern Epicureanism, which would be impossible.[3] Instead, we look at a few interesting and important episodes in the life of early modern Epicureanism, focusing on Epicureanism in natural philosophy.

We begin with two early moderns who had a great deal to say about ancient Epicureanism, and who—unlike almost everyone who followed them—discussed it with attention to detail, concern for textual accuracy, and a
p. 640 critical attitude concerning ↳ the status of the various sources for knowledge of early modern Epicureanism. One is the French priest, astronomer, and philosopher Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), who devoted decades to the history of ancient Epicureanism and whose own philosophy was in many ways influenced by it. The other is the English philosopher Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688), for whom the "Atomick Atheism" of Democritus, Leucippus, and Epicurus was a leading enemy.[4]

Looking at how Gassendi (§2) and Cudworth (§3) conceive of Epicureanism will give us a sense of what the early moderns considered important in the ancient tradition. It will also point us toward three main themes of early modern Epicureanism in natural philosophy, which we will then discuss at greater length in the following sections: atomism (§4), materialism about the mind or soul (§5), and the denial of providence, often accompanied by deflationary explanations of religious belief (§6).[5]

2. Gassendi

Gassendi devoted a series of works to ancient Epicureanism: *De vita et moribus Epicuri* (*On the Life and Character of Epicurus*, 1647); *Syntagma philosophiae Epicuri* (*Treatise of the Philosophy of Epicurus*, 1649); and *Animadversiones in decimum librum Diogenis Laertii* (*Notes on the Tenth Book of Diogenes Laertius*, 1649). In these works, he draws on a huge number of sources. The two most important are Lucretius's *De rerum natura*—the single most influential source for early modern thinking about Epicureanism—and Book 10 of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*. But Gassendi also deals extensively with those ancient sources which he saw as the origin of misleading or unfair criticisms of Epicureanism, such as Cicero's *De natura deorum*, Lactantius's *Divinae institutiones*, and Plutarch's *Adversus Colotem*. A great deal of material from Gassendi's Epicurus project reappears in his massive posthumous *Syntagma Philosophicum*. The main goal of the *Syntagma* is to present Gassendi's own philosophical system—a system that has a number of Epicurean elements and which later readers described as a form of Epicureanism, although Gassendi himself disclaimed the label.[6]

Gassendi's project of constructing a positive representation of Epicurus has a number of aspects. Above all, he wants to represent Epicureanism as a serious philosophical system, like Aristotelianism and Stoicism—and ultimately to show that Epicureanism is preferable to either, both in terms of explanatory power and theological acceptability. This takes some doing, for Gassendi's contemporaries thought of Epicureanism as both dangerous and ridiculous. Gassendi tries to figure out how Epicurus's reputation for immorality had developed in the first place. He concludes that it was due to "the hatred and calumny of Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus and other Stoics."[7] He also tries to reconstruct Epicurus's lost work of epistemology (*The Canon*) in an attempt to show that Epicureanism was non-dogmatic and observation-based—something that would make it far superior to Aristotelianism, which had been presented and criticized in Gassendi's ↳ first book, the
p. 641 *Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos (Exercises in the form of paradoxes against the Aristotelians*, 1624).[8]

Epicureanism had a dangerous reputation in the early seventeenth century, and one might well wonder if Gassendi's project of making Epicureanism better known was prudent. Indeed, Gassendi's correspondent Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639), who had spent 27 years in prison for heresy and rebellion, seems to have written to Gassendi expressing his concerns about the advisability of the Epicurus project. Gassendi replied that he was not planning to transgress against religion in any way—he would, for instance, insist on providence, contra Epicurus.[9] Throughout the Epicurus project, Gassendi is very careful to point out the respects in which Epicureanism is incompatible with Christian doctrine and should be rejected for that reason, as well as those respects in which it should be rejected on other grounds, such as incompatibility with recent advances in natural philosophy. However, Gassendi also argues that Epicureanism is ultimately *easier* to reconcile with the doctrines of the Catholic Church than Aristotelianism. Of course, he had to carefully pick and choose which aspects of Epicureanism to appropriate and which to reject—but in that he was doing precisely what Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) had done for Aristotelianism, Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) for Platonism, and Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) for Stoicism.[10]

Which aspects of Epicureanism did Gassendi appropriate, and which did he reject? We can get some sense of this by looking at our three main themes: atomism, materialism, and atheism.

First, atomism. Lucretius uses the principle *nullam rem e nilo gigni divinitus umquam* (no thing was ever born from nothing by divine power) to argue that there must be indestructible atoms: otherwise, all things would have long ago disintegrated into nothing.[11] Gassendi relies heavily on the related principle *nihil nihilo fit* ("nothing comes from nothing"). But this principle, on Gassendi's view, is "an axiom of physics and should be understood as concerned with the power of nature itself, not with the power of its author."[12] Since God is the author of nature, he is not bound by its laws.[13] Hence considerations about how change occurs in the natural world support atomism but have no bearing on divine creation. This move quickly neutralizes one line of objection to Epicurean atomism without threatening Epicurean physics.

A second major theme is materialism. Epicurean materialism was associated with the denial of incorporeal principles. This included a denial of Aristotelian forms and a denial of incorporeal substances such as God and the incorporeal human soul (which early modern Aristotelians viewed as both a substance and the substantial form of the human body). Gassendi accepts what he thinks faith requires, namely that an incorporeal God and an incorporeal human soul exist. At the same time, he agrees with Epicurus in rejecting the existence of forms —with one important exception: "the rational soul, or mind … is rightly judged to be a substance and a substantial form."[14] This exception is not well integrated in Gassendi's system. Most of human cognition, on his view, is a more sophisticated version of animal cognition and hence can be explained in purely material terms. The incorporeal intellect forms notions only of things that cannot be represented by images—namely, God and other incorporeal substances.[15]

p. 642 Early modern philosophers who defended the incorporeality of the human soul usually had at least two main motivations. First, they thought that the best way to guarantee our knowledge of personal immortality was to show that the human soul is incorporeal. Various people pointed out that the immortality of the soul did not follow necessarily from its incorporeality: God could destroy an incorporeal soul if he wanted to.[16] Others pointed out that God could make us immortal *without* giving us incorporeal souls.[17] Nevertheless, most writers thought that incorporeality and immortality were a natural combination, and Gassendi concurred.

A second motivation for defending the incorporeality of the human soul was that so doing seemed necessary to defend human freedom. (At least to those who held the majority view that liberty and necessity are incompatible.) The relationship between early modern Epicureanism and determinism is complex. Gassendi recognized that Epicureanism was not deterministic and saw the swerve as Epicurus's attempt to break out of Democritean determinism, thus allowing for genuine human freedom. For this, he praised Epicurus.[18] However, he thought the attempt was unsuccessful, even hopeless—and not only because it presupposed that the mind is an atomic composite. In addition, he argued that the swerve would do nothing to guarantee genuinely free choice. It would simply introduce chance.[19] The right way to guarantee freedom is by making the mind incorporeal.

A third major theme the early moderns associated with Epicureanism is what one might loosely call atheism. This encompassed the denial of the existence of God, but also more narrowly the denial of divine providence. Gassendi recognized that many of his contemporaries would refuse to take Epicureanism seriously because they associated it with the denial of providence. He had two strategies for dealing with this, which were supposed to work in tandem. He forthrightly states that Epicurus denied divine providence, and notes that this is Epicurus's "most serious failing."[20] There is one God, and he is concerned for the well-being of his creation in general, and of human beings in particular. At the same time, he argues that Epicurus is no worse off in that respect than any of the other ancients; indeed, he is *better* off.[21] Various writers had tried to reconcile Aristotelianism and Stoicism with Christian belief in divine providence, even to the extent of reading Stoic theology as in effect an anticipation of that belief.[22] Gassendi argued that this is a mistake. Greek theology is more like nature-worship than it is like Christian belief, and we are better off simply rejecting it. Epicurus alone saw the need to reject pagan religion altogether and hence is the closest to true religion.

Gassendi was widely read and extremely popular in his own day. For succeeding generations, his influence tended to be mediated by shorter, vernacular presentations of his views. In England, the most popular of these was *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana, or, A Fabrick of Science Natural, upon the Hypothesis of Atoms Founded by Epicurus, Repaired [by] Petrus Gassendus; Augmented [by] Walter Charleton* (1654), by Walter Charleton (1619–1707). In France, the most popular vernacular presentation was the seven volume *Abridgement of the Philosophy of Gassendi* (1684), by François Bernier (1620–1699). Both of these works are partial translations, with some editorializing.

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3. Cudworth

Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688) is regularly identified as a "Cambridge Platonist," and his reaction to Epicureanism was as negative as that label suggests. Cudworth's main work is the 1678 *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, according to its subtitle a book in which "all the reason and philosophy of atheism is confuted; and its impossibility demonstrated." Cudworth was engaged with contemporary philosophy and was a forceful critic of Hobbes and Descartes. But his discussion of philosophical issues involves persistent reference to the history of philosophy—so much so that Locke suggested that Cudworth's book could act as a textbook of ancient Greek philosophy.[23]

The *True Intellectual System* may not be much read now, but it was widely read and engaged with at the time. John Locke (1632–1704) owned a copy and drew on it, in particular in his discussion of the existence of God in *Essay* 4.10.[24] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) engaged with *True Intellectual System* more than once, ultimately publishing an essay distinguishing his own view from Cudworth's.[25] Isaac Newton (1643–1727) too was a reader of Cudworth.[26] And these famous names provide just a small glimpse of the role of Cudworth's work in seventeenth-century discussion.

Cudworth's historical engagement in the *True Intellectual System* involves explicit and persistent opposition to Epicurus. This begins with the frontispiece, which depicts confusion to atheists, one of whom is Epicurus, and victory to theists.[27] The criticism continues to the end of the book:

> Wherefore as for Democritus and Epicurus, whose Encomiums the Atheists here so loudly sing forth; we say, That however they have made so great a noise in the World, and have been so much cried up of late, yet were they really no better, than a Couple of Infatuated Sophists, or Witty Fools; and Debauchers of Mankind.[28]

Here we focus on Cudworth's characterization of Epicurus's views rather than his criticism of them. That characterization involves all three themes mentioned earlier—atomism, materialism, and atheism.

Cudworth says that Epicurus made "*Sensless Atoms to be the first Principles*, not only of all Bodies (for that was a thing admitted before by *Empedocles* and other Atomists that were Theists) but also of *All things whatsoever* in the whole Universe."[29] Atomism is the one central Epicurean view with which Cudworth agrees, but he does not praise Epicureans for believing it. Cudworth argues instead that Epicurus went too far in using atomism to explain everything in the world. He also argues that atomism was not invented by Epicurus or Democritus, but is far older.[30] This argument has, perhaps, a dual function: it denies Epicurus any passing credit for a good view, and it weakens the connection between atomism and Epicureanism—something that was important to Cudworth since he himself was an atomist. However, judging by later discussions, Cudworth does not seem to have been very successful in weakening that connection.

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The innovation of Democritus and Epicurus, in Cudworth's eyes, is not in being atomists, but in being atomists about all of nature, and beyond that in being atheistic atomists. Cudworth, like Gassendi, uses the principle that "*Nothing can come from Nothing, nor go to Nothing*."[31] Cudworth uses this principle in arguing that atomic atheism is inconsistent. The principle is an essential part of any argument for atomism because it shows that apparent cases of generation and corruption are actually mere rearrangement of atoms. But that same principle also implies that there are incorporeal souls.[32] For if there were not, then the power of thought would come from something unthinking, that is, from something that is nothing with respect to thought. Finally, Cudworth uses the principle to argue for the existence of God: given that principle, "it is demonstratively certain, that every thing was not made, but that there is something necessarily self-existent, and which could not but be."[33] Thus, Epicurean atomism, on Cudworth's view, is internally inconsistent.

Cudworth insists that Epicureanism is atheistic.[34] Early moderns typically describe many sorts of heterodoxy as atheism: to believe in a false God is not to believe in God at all. But Cudworth also seems to think that Epicurus's claim to believe in gods is insincere:

> [T]his Theology of *Epicurus* was but Romantical, it being directly Contrary to his avowed and professed Principles, to admitt of any other Being then what was Concreted of Atoms, and consequently Corruptible; and that he did this upon a Politick Account, thereby to decline the Common *Odium*, and those Dangers and Inconveniences which otherwise he might have incurred by a downright denial of a God.[35]

Epicurus, that is, held views that implied atheism, and knew it, but said he believed in some gods in order to avoid criticism. Whatever Epicurus may have said, the fundamental Epicurean picture of the world is an atheist one.

Cudworth's discussion of atheism is clearly focused—perhaps surprisingly so for the time—on the denial of the existence of God. But that focus still allowed Cudworth to comment on related issues. For one thing, Cudworth was not merely concerned to show that some eternal being exists, but also that this being providently governs the world. Beyond that, Cudworth was aware of Hobbes's attempts to give a deflationary explanation of religious belief that invoked fear as an important cause.[36] We will discuss that attempt further in §6. For now, we note that Cudworth took such explanations not merely to be explanations of religious belief, but also to contribute to arguments against the existence of God.

Atomism connects closely to another main theme of Epicureanism: materialism about the mind. If the motion of atoms is to explain everything in the natural world, it must explain human minds and their operations. Thus, a thoroughgoing Epicurean atomism will have to be a form of materialism. Of course, one might be an atomist and not a materialist, because one thinks that the atoms are not the only things in the natural world.
p. 645 Indeed, this was Cudworth's view: that there are atoms, but also ↳ incorporeal minds and incorporeal "plastic natures" that guide the workings of corporeal beings.[37]

We said earlier that the incorporeality of the human soul is important to early moderns because of its role in defending personal immortality and libertarian freedom. Cudworth is interesting in this connection inasmuch as he associates Epicureanism with determinism and the denial of human freedom. The relevant notion of necessity is closely related to the thought that all change in the world can be explained by the unguided motions of atoms:

> The *Democritick Fate*, is nothing but The *Material Necessity of all things without a God*: it supposing *Sensless Matter, Necessarily Moved*, to be the onely Original and Principle of all things: Which therefore is called by *Epicurus, The Physiological*; by us, the *Atheistick Fate*.[38]

That might seem not to be Epicurus's view. Even Cudworth here calls it "Democritick," not Epicurean. And did Epicurus himself not believe something different, that there is a special motion of atoms—the swerve—that accounts somehow for human freedom? As in the case of atheism, Cudworth acknowledges what is said in the text, but is unimpressed:

> *Epicurus*, (... having, in all probability, therefore a Mind to Innovate Something, that he might not seem to have borrowed all from *Democritus*) did by violence introduce *Liberty* of *Will*, into his *Hypothesis*; for the Salving whereof, he ridiculously devized, That his *Third Motion of Atoms*.[39]

Cudworth says it is "intolerably absurd" of Epicurus to suppose *Contingency*, and a Kind of *Free Will*, in the *Motions* of *Sensless Atoms*."[40] He does not go so far here as in the discussion of atheism, for he does not quite say

that Epicurus did not mean what he said. But Cudworth gives the view no credit as a way of introducing freedom within a deterministic, atomistic, atheistic framework.

Cudworth and Gassendi, then, identify similar central themes of Epicureanism, including atomism, materialism about the human mind, and a deflationary approach to religion, if not outright atheism. These views do not entail each other, yet they fit together well as a group. If you think that the content of the natural world is exhausted by atoms moving in the void, then you will plausibly also adopt the other views. If atoms moving in the void explain everything, then they explain human thought, and we need not suppose there is an incorporeal mind or soul. (This may also lead one to deny personal immortality and genuine human freedom.) And there are certainly questions about how religious belief fits into the picture. Atomism does not by itself imply atheism—perhaps there is a God who governs the world of atoms for the good of humankind—but is consistent with it—for perhaps all there is, and ever has been, is the world of atoms and void.

Thus, the various views fit together. But they can be, and were, held separately. For example, Hobbes seems by
p. 646 many standards to have been an Epicurean, but he was not ↳ an atomist. Indeed, he argued against Lucretius's case for atomism.[41] We will begin our examination of themes in §4 by looking at atomism but will also look at the other related views (materialism and atheism) on their own, even when held by non-atomist philosophers.

Cudworth agreed with Gassendi's broad picture of what Epicureanism was, and he borrowed quite a lot of Gassendi's scholarship. Obviously, he disagreed with Gassendi's estimate of Epicurus's philosophy: Cudworth reckoned that Gassendi thought too highly of Epicurus. Indeed, Cudworth thought that this had led Gassendi astray in aspects of his interpretation. He goes so far as to accuse Gassendi of "Fraud and Juggling" in trying "to extol and applaud Epicurus, as one who approached nearer to Christianity than all the other Philosophers." Here he has in mind Gassendi's claim that by denying the providentialism of the pagan gods, Epicurus came closer to the truth than those ancient philosophers who thought Zeus governed the world.[42]

4. Atomism

Early moderns often conceived of Epicurean atomism as the new consensus in physics, and of Gassendi as playing a pivotal role in its rise.[43] Consider Robert Boyle (1627–1691):

> The atomical philosophy invented or brought into request by Democritus, Leucippus, Epicurus, & their contemporaries … is so luckily revived & so skillfully celebrated in diverse parts of Europe by the learned pens of Gassendus, Magnenus, Descartes, & his disciples our deservedly famous countryman Sir Kenelme Digby & many other writers especially those that handle magnetical and electrical operations that it is now grown too considerable to be any longer laughed at, & considerable enough to deserve a serious inquiry.[44]

Or Émilie Du Châtelet (1706–1749):

> Most philosophers today … conceive of matter simply as a mass, uniform and similar, with no internal difference; but, the small particles have such diversified forms and sizes that the infinite variety existing in this universe can result from them. Thus, they suppose the only difference between the constituent particles of gold and paper, for example, to be that which comes from the shape and arrangement of these particles … This opinion … is nearly that of Epicurus on atoms, as revived by Gassendi in our own day; these solid and indivisible particles of matter, distinguished from one another by their shape and size, only differ in name from Epicurus's atoms.[45]

As these passages show, early moderns understood what it was to be an Epicurean in this area quite loosely. Boyle, for instance, counted *Descartes* as an Epicurean atomist. He knew that Descartes denied the existence of

p. 647 the void and that he was committed to ↳ the infinite divisibility of matter. These are straightforward consequences of Descartes's view of the relationship between matter and geometrical extension. But Boyle thought it sufficient for calling Descartes an atomist that the latter attempted to explain the workings of nature by the interaction of imperceptibly small particles whose properties were limited to size, shape, and motion. To deny that there are forms, and to try to explain everything in natural philosophy through the interaction of tiny particles with only the mechanical properties of size, shape, and motion is, for early moderns, to be an Epicurean. Epicurean atomism is for them, thus, mechanical corpuscularianism. (We, however, reserve "atomism" for views according to which the tiny particles are indivisible.)[46]

The view that early moderns thought of as Epicurean atomism was not all that close to the view of the historical Epicurus. One big difference concerns atomic motion. This was an important issue for early modern natural philosophers, and mechanical atomists made many different attempts to develop a physically viable and theologically acceptable account of atomic motion.[47]

The main differences between early modern views of atomic motion and Epicurus's own involve atomic motion.[48] Gassendi held, following Epicurus, that atoms move because they have an innate *vis motrix* (motive power) or *gravitas*.[49] He made a not particularly successful effort to reconcile this with the Galilean science of motion, according to which no force is required for a body in motion to stay in motion.[50] But this aspect of Gassendi's system did not get much uptake. Bernier mocked it, and most later atomists either ignored it or simply did not know about it.[51] The general assumption was that the Galilean science of motion applied equally to atoms and to macroscopic bodies. One way in which Gassendi's atomism differs from ancient Epicurean atomism *was* widely accepted: that the motion of atoms is the result of an exercise of the divine will. Gassendi seems to think that *vis motrix* or *gravitas* is essential to atoms, in the sense that God could not have created the very same atoms with different motive power. However, he could have created atoms with the same size and shape but different motive power (or with no motive power), or he might have created no atoms at all. Thus, to explain the order apparent in the universe we cannot simply advert to its atomic components, but must also invoke God's purposes in creating the particular atoms he chose to create. This is an instance of Gassendi's general tactic for making Epicurean ideas acceptable, and it shows that philosophers can use views inspired by Epicureanism to *support* religion.

The claim that atomic motion derives from God was fairly common; indeed, every Epicurean atomist who was not an avowed atheist adopted it. But different philosophers spelled it out in very different ways. To say that God is the ultimate cause of atomic motion could mean that God gave atoms an innate power to move—or that God gave them an initial push and then stayed out of the way, as later deists thought. It could also mean that God keeps the atoms in motion at every moment, thus being a form of occasionalism. So, there are ways of understanding how atomic motion depends on God according to which matter is genuinely active, and ways according to which it is inert. The issue of whether matter is inert or active recurs again and again in
p. 648 seventeenth-century natural philosophy. A commitment to the inertness of matter has the great advantage, ↳ from the point of view of many early modern philosophers, of making a transcendent, incorporeal God necessary in order for motion to be possible.[52] The inertness of matter also served, for some, as a reason why the mind must be incorporeal—the idea being that matter is passive, but minds are active, and one cannot make an active thing from passive matter.[53]

Robert Boyle is a good case for seeing how complicated the issue of atomism and the activity of matter is. He says that "matter alone, unless it be moved, is altogether unactive."[54] More generally, when he speaks just in terms of matter in motion, he seems to think of matter as inert. But when he speaks of the other properties of matter, as in his chemistry, he appears to be committed to various forms of active matter like seminal principles and ferments, and to offer no attempt to reduce such activity to atomic motion. Indeed, he does not even suggest that such a reduction is possible.[55] In this respect he is not so different from Gassendi himself, who makes liberal use of various active corpuscles with no attempt to reduce their powers to atomic *vis motrix*.

One can see something of the same pattern in Newton. On the one hand, Newton does not think of motion as requiring any innate motive power in atoms. On the other hand, he suggests that there may well be certain forms of active power in the material world:

> [I]t seems probable to me, that God in the Beginning form'd Matter in solid, massy, hard, impenetrable, moveable Particles, of such Sizes and Figures, and with such other Properties, and in such Proportion to Space, as most conduced to the End for which he form'd them; and that these primitive Particles being Solids, are incomparably harder than any porous Bodies compounded of them; even so very hard, as never to wear or break in pieces; no ordinary Power being able to divide what God himself made one in the first Creation … And therefore, that Nature may be lasting, the Changes of corporeal Things are to be placed only in the various Separations and new Associations and Motions of these permanent Particles … It seems to me farther, that these Particles have not only a *Vis inertiae* … but also that they are moved by certain active Principles, such as is that of Gravity.[56]

Those philosophers we might see as early modern Epicurean atomists thus seem to have widely adopted something like the general Epicurean view of matter as active, while rejecting other details of Epicurean atomism.

5. Materialism

As we noted earlier, materialism about the human mind was one of the views associated with Epicureanism in the early modern period. In this section, we look at two notable examples of such materialism: one from seventeenth-century England, that of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679); and one from eighteenth-century France, that of Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1709–1751).

p. 649 In a short early essay, Leibniz describes "two sects of naturalists fashionable today which have their source in antiquity": "one revives the opinions of Epicurus and the other is, in fact, composed of Stoics. The former believes that any substance—including the soul and God himself—is corporeal, that is to say, composed of extended matter or mass."[57] The one modern named as an example of this group was Hobbes. That is, Leibniz thought Hobbes was an Epicurean materialist.

One might argue about the scope, details, and development of Hobbes's materialism, but Leibniz's central suggestion, that Hobbes was a materialist, is correct. According to Hobbes—certainly by the time of *Leviathan* (1651), if not before—there is no incorporeal part to the human being.[58] In particular, there is no incorporeal intellect that thinks without using images. Instead, we just have a corporeal imagination. Other cognitive powers, such as the ability to think generally, which might seem not to be grounded in the imagination, are added by our use of language.

It is clear, then, that Hobbes was a materialist about the human mind. Insofar as any sort of materialism about the human mind was thought of as an Epicurean position, Hobbes was an Epicurean materialist. But is there more to say than that? Was Hobbes in any more distinctive way an *Epicurean* materialist? Hobbes held other broadly Epicurean views, certainly: consider his denial of providence and his use of fear as an explanation for religious belief, which we will discuss in §6. But was his *materialism* in any distinctive way Epicurean? After all, he was not an atomist materialist (though he was a corpuscularian one).[59]

The distinctive connection to Epicurean thought, in Hobbes's case, is his mechanical explanation of the mind. Even if they do not believe in atoms moving in the void, a materialist who explains the human mind in this way —through the structure and motion of its smaller, unthinking material parts—explains the thinking of bodies as an atomist materialist would do. (Contrast a materialist who holds that some or all matter is fundamentally and irreducibly thinking.) Hobbes's materialism and Epicureanism thus have in common a reductive

materialist explanation that extends to the phenomenon of thought. A materialist who holds such a view may reasonably be considered an Epicurean in this respect, even if they are not a strict atomist.[60]

La Mettrie lived and wrote a century after Hobbes: here we focus on his *L'homme machine* from 1748. In *L'homme machine*, as in Hobbes's work, we find materialism about the human mind.[61] La Mettrie's work makes a rather different initial impression than Hobbes's though, having a different focus. La Mettrie identifies "physicians who were philosophers" as the key inquirers, and there is in general a medical angle to his materialism, unlike Hobbes's.[62] As the book's title suggests, it centers on the notion of the human as an animal, an organic machine: "The human body is a machine which winds itself up."[63] There is a related emphasis on continuity between humans and other creatures, exemplified by a scheme for educating an orangutan.[64] There is also—and this ties neatly back to Hobbes—an emphasis on the role of the imagination, which is taken to be corporeal. The imagination "is the soul, because it plays all its roles."[65] There is no further, possibly incorporeal, intellectual faculty. There is just the corporeal imagination, doing all the work of the mind.

p. 650 La Mettrie is then, like Hobbes, an Epicurean insofar as he is committed to materialism about the human mind. But as in Hobbes's case, we can also ask whether there is in La Mettrie's materialism something that is even more distinctively Epicurean. La Mettrie did on occasion seem to identify himself as an Epicurean: one of his works is a *System of Epicurus*, albeit a system of Epicurus that seems more about La Mettrie than Epicurus.[66] Beyond that, however, we can ask whether there are distinctive connections to Epicurus in the content of his views.

In Hobbes's case, that close connection came from a commitment to mechanical explanation. Such a connection might at first seem to be absent from La Mettrie's work. The emphasis on the biological, and on the role of the physician as inquirer, might seem to show that something else is going on in La Mettrie. In particular, La Mettrie seems to be concerned with living matter in a way that Hobbes is not.

There is certainly a difference of emphasis, and perhaps a difference of method. But despite that, there are notably mechanistic aspects to La Mettrie's thought. Consider just the title of the work we have focused on, which tells us that man is a machine. Consider also the claim at the start of the work's penultimate paragraph: "Let us then conclude boldly that man is a machine and that there is in the whole universe only one diversely modified substance."[67] This is the commitment of a seventeenth-century mechanist—that the universe is made of one sort of material stuff; that the explanation of the non-basic features of natural bodies is fundamentally the same as the explanation of the features of artificial machines, relying on the shapes, sizes, and motions of the small parts of the bodies. No doubt the approaches of Hobbes and La Mettrie differ in many ways.[68] But even a hundred years after Hobbes, and though he was thinking about anatomy rather than atoms, La Mettrie was still promoting a mechanistic, Epicurean approach to explanation of natural phenomena.

6. God, Divine Providence, and Religious Belief

Early moderns associated Epicureanism with atheism. Gassendi tried to counter this association, arguing that Epicurus's views were less in tension with Christian belief than those of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics were (see §2). None of the ancients recognized the one true God, and it is better to realize that the gods of your culture are false than to worship them. Cudworth rejected this, arguing that Epicurus denied the existence of all gods and that he merely talked of gods "upon a Politick Account" (see §3).[69]

Epicureanism was sometimes used as a synonym for atheism. However, even a famous early modern Epicurean "atheist" such as Hobbes stated explicitly that God exists. But even if we take those statements at face value, Hobbes and other early moderns seemed religiously questionable because of two Epicurean themes of their work: the denial of providence and the provision of deflationary explanations of religious belief.

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6.1. Providence

The theology of providence is its own complex issue. But Christian belief in providence requires, at least, belief that God knows and controls the world. It generally also involves belief that God cares about the world, or about human beings in particular. Some modern philosophers were notably Epicurean but held on to belief in divine providence. Thus, many early moderns thought of Gassendi as an Epicurean, even though he affirmed divine providence. Nevertheless, Epicureanism might seem to tend toward a rejection of providence. The obvious way for an Epicurean to deny providence would be, of course, to be an atheist. But one may deny divine providence without being an atheist, and ancient Epicurean positions seem to have done that. Several Epicurean moderns did so too. Hobbes provides an example here. Even if one disagrees with Cudworth's reading of Hobbes as an atheist, Hobbes's stated theological views—both his earlier negative theology and his later view of God as a corporeal spirit—are non-providential.[70]

Beyond that, we can see that various moderns employ an argument against divine providence which they take to be Epicurean, following Lactantius. In note E to the article "Paulicians" in his *Dictionary*, Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) quotes Lactantius's reply to that argument, which includes a version of the argument itself.[71] Bayle writes of Lactantius's presentation of his opponent's argument that "Epicurus himself could not have set it forth more precisely and forcefully," but finds Lactantius's own response "pitiful."[72] This fits a more general theme in Bayle, that there are serious and influential Epicurean objections to providence that deal with the origin of evil, but that the "Church Fathers … hardly gave a good answer" to them.[73]

Later, Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach (1723–1789) would also cite Lactantius in presenting the Epicurean argument. Holbach puts the point more forcefully than Bayle, saying: "Reflecting minds have been waiting for a reasonable solution of these difficulties, for more than two thousand years; and our divines tell us, that they will be removed only in a future life."[74] This fits well with Holbach's general thought about providence, that there just is not much evidence of it: "Providence sleeps over the greater part of the inhabitants of this world."[75]

The very same argument, again tied explicitly to Epicurus, was also noted by David Hume (1711–1776). In Part 10 of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume too—or at least his character Philo—notes the lack of an explanation, that "Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered."[76] Another famous discussion of providence with links to Epicureanism figures in §11 of Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State."[77] Here, unlike in other sections of the *Enquiry*, the discussion unfolds in multiple frames. Hume begins by recounting a conversation with an unnamed friend, who goes on to conceive and present a speech in which he imagines himself to be Epicurus addressing an Athenian audience. Thus, Hume distances himself from the views in the speech, which are presented as Epicurean. The speech targets the uses and abuses of design arguments for the existence of God—in particular, the use of such arguments to
p. 652 attempt to establish that there is justice in the ↳ world. Hume was to some extent fighting eighteenth-century battles in ancient guise.[78] But as well as invoking Epicurus, he shared an Epicurean opposition to belief in divine providence. For Hume as for Holbach, this opposition involves, in part, questioning whether there is evidence for providence.[79]

6.2. Deflationary Explanations

Another thread connecting Epicurean (and in particular Lucretian) philosophy to Hobbes and other moderns is the provision of deflationary explanations of religious belief. These are explanations of religious belief that do not rely on the actual existence or actions of supernatural beings. Not only do Lucretius and Hobbes both offer such explanations, but there are close connections between the details of their explanations. The central idea is that people who are unable to explain the happenings of the world, and feel a related fear of them, attribute them to the doings of supernatural beings.

In a comment early in *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius presents fear and the failure of ordinary causal explanation as the real bases of religious belief: "The fact is that all mortals are in the grip of fear, because they observe many things happening on earth and in the sky and, being at a complete loss for an explanation of their cause, suppose that a supernatural power is responsible for them."[80] In this respect Hobbes is a modern Lucretian:

> This perpetual fear, always accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes, as it were in the dark, must needs have for object something. And therefore when there is nothing to be seen, there is nothing to accuse, either of their good, or evil fortune, but some *power*, or agent *invisible*: in which sense perhaps it was, that some of the old poets said, that the gods were at first created by human fear: which spoken of the gods, (that is to say, of the many gods of the Gentiles) is very true.[81]

The reference to "some of the old poets" seems likely to be a reference to Lucretius, among others.[82] And the core of the explanation here is the same as that we have just seen offered by Lucretius. Hobbes similarly adverts to fear and the failure of causal explanation, and he relates them in the same way: people fear what they cannot explain and thus come to talk about gods.[83]

Now, Hobbes did continue on to talk about monotheistic views, and gave a different explanation in that case, so his ultimate explanation of the causes of religious belief is not the same as Lucretius's—but then again, the two authors needed to explain different forms of religious belief. Moreover Cudworth, at least, supposed that Hobbes in fact believed that his fear-based explanation applied to monotheism as well as polytheism.[84]

Such Lucretian explanations were not confined to Hobbes's work. We can see similar thoughts in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,* for example.[85] And as with the arguments about evil and providence discussed earlier, we see these explanations in the eighteenth-century work of Hume and Holbach.[86]

7. Conclusion

We have seen a wide range of views described as Epicurean: that all material objects are composed of atoms whose properties are restricted to size, shape, and motion; that the human mind is material and composed of atoms; that everything that exists is composed of atoms; that pleasure is the end of life; that there is no such thing as divine providence; and that one can give deflationary explanations of religious belief. We have also seen a wide range of philosophers described as Epicurean: Bacon, Descartes, Galileo, Gassendi, Hobbes, Holbach, Hume, La Mettrie, and Spinoza.

As this list of "Epicurean" doctrines and figures shows, the category "Epicurean" is both vague and elastic. Nevertheless, it is useful for two related reasons. One is that the category played an important role in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discussions. Thus, understanding how early moderns used it helps us see the landscape as the early moderns saw it.

Another reason has to do with today's scholarly landscape. For a long time, scholars of early modern philosophy told the story of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy as a struggle between rationalists and empiricists that ended only when Kant showed how to synthesize the two.[87] This Kantian narrative and its categories of "empiricism" and "rationalism" have fallen out of favor. However, scholars have not given up the desire for an overarching narrative, and other interpretive frameworks have been offered in place of the Kantian one. One recently suggested narrative tells the story of early modern European philosophy —at least, early modern natural philosophy—in terms of the distinction between experimental and speculative philosophy.[88] But another option is to tell the story of early modern philosophy in terms of the revival of ancient schools—skeptics, Platonists, Epicureans, and Stoics—and indeed of the persistence of some Aristotelianism.[89] Popkin's study of the deep influence of ancient skepticism in the modern period is well known, but a singular focus on the influence of skepticism is itself distorting.[90] More recent interventions have

emphasized the revival of Epicureanism, Platonism, and Stoicism.[91] Appreciating the profound modern interest in these ancient views can help us to frame the broad sweep of early modern philosophy. As with the interpretive framework that distinguishes between experimental and speculative philosophy, this approach has the advantage of using categories the early moderns themselves used, helping us balance the desire for a narrative with historical accuracy.

Notes

1. A great deal has been written about early modern Epicureanism. One excellent overview is Wilson 2008, which focuses on the influence of Epicureanism within philosophy. Another overview is Greenblatt 2011, which argues that the rediscovery of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* explains "how the world swerved in a new direction" (11) in the Renaissance. See also
p. 654
Leddy and Lifshitz 2009; LoLordo 2011; Norbrook, Harrison, and Hardie 2016; and ↳ Deneys-Tunney and Moreau 2003. On the other hand, see Levitin 2016 for an argument that the influence of Epicureanism in England has been vastly overstated in the secondary literature to date.

2. Barckley 1631: 10.

3. We also do not attempt to examine the availability and use of Epicurean sources, another significant project. For the rediscovery of Lucretius, see Brown 2010 and Passannante 2011. For Gassendi's engagement with Epicurean texts, see Rochot 1944. For Epicureanism in seventeenth-century Britain, see Levitin 2016. For seventeenth-century France, see Kors 2016.

4. Gassendi and Cudworth were by no means the first early moderns to discuss Epicureanism at length. We begin with them rather than earlier figures like Lorenzo Valla or Erasmus because they are (relatively speaking) central figures in the canon of early modern philosophy; because examining their use of Epicureanism is a convenient way of setting up some of the main themes of early modern Epicureanism; and because their engagement with Epicurus and Epicureanism is much more overt than that of figures such as Hobbes and Locke.

5. Other interesting themes include the plurality of worlds, Lucretian evolution, and Epicurean epistemology.

6. Gassendi 1964: 1.30b.

7. Gassendi 1964: 5.193a. Translations from Gassendi are the authors' own.

8. Levitin 2016: 333.

9. See Gassendi's reply to Campanella of November 2, 1632 (Gassendi 1964: 6.54b).

10. It may also be relevant that Gassendi understood how to stay out of trouble when addressing potentially theologically controversial material. Gassendi was a successful member of the church hierarchy and had powerful patrons. His treatment of Copernicanism, which clearly implies that Copernicanism is the best theory while explicitly stating that he bows to the authority of the Catholic Church also shows that he well understood how to deal with potentially controversial material. See LoLordo 2015.

11. Lucretius 2001: 1.150; 225 ff.

12. Gassendi 1649: 1.92.

13. Cf. Gassendi 1964: 1.163a.

14. Gassendi 1964: 1.466b.

15. Gassendi 1964: 2.440b–451a. There is some dispute in the secondary literature about how seriously to take Gassendi's discussion of the incorporeal soul. Bloch 1971 and Wilson 2008, for instance, are inclined to downplay it, Osler 2009 to emphasize its sincerity and importance. We think that Gassendi's claims are entirely sincere, although also rather unsatisfying.

16. For example, Descartes in his Synopsis of the *Meditations* (Descartes 1996: 7.13).

17. For example, Locke in the Stillingfleet correspondence (Locke 1823: 4.166).

18. Gassendi 1964: 2.837b–838a. On the swerve in ancient Epicureanism, see Warren, this volume.

19. This point comes up again in Locke, without reference to Epicurus (Locke 1975: 2.21.51).

20. Gassendi 1964: 2.358b.

21. Gassendi 1964: 5.195b.

22. On the Stoic account of providence, see Powers, this volume.

23. Locke 1823: 9.185–6. A century and more after Locke, the Advertisement to the 1820 edition of the *True Intellectual System* described it as "the most valuable treasure of the ancient theology and philosophy extant in any language."

p. 655 24. Harrison and Laslett 1965: #896, 119. On Locke and Cudworth, see Ayers 1991: 2.169–83 and Duncan 2022: 131–58.

25. Leibniz's first notes from 1689 are at Leibniz 1923: 6.4.1944–55. Leibniz's correspondence with Cudworth's daughter Damaris Masham (1658–1708), who sent him a copy of the *True Intellectual System*, is at Leibniz 1875–90: 3.332–75 and largely translated at Leibniz 1997: 202–5. Leibniz's essay on plastic natures is at Leibniz 1875–90: 6.539–46 and translated at Leibniz 1976: 586–91.

26. McGuire and Rattansi 1966; Sailor 1988.

27. Hutton 2001: 61.

28. Cudworth 1678: 890.

29. Cudworth 1678: 61. Cf. Cudworth 1678: Preface to the Reader, and 837, as well as Cudworth 1996: 4.6.15.

30. Cudworth thinks the inventor of atomism was most likely the Sidonian Mochus or Moschus. In the *True Intellectual System* he reports the suggestion that Moschus be identified with Moses (Cudworth 1678: 15). In the *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* he endorses that suggestion (Cudworth 1996: 39).

31. Cudworth 1678: 29.

32. "[T]he same Principle of Reason which made the Ancient Physiologers to become Atomists, must needs induce them also to be Incorporealists" (Cudworth 1678: 40).

33. Cudworth 1678: 738.

34. In describing Epicurus as an atheist, Cudworth is probably following Cicero. See, e.g., Cicero ND 1.85, 1.123f., 2.76; elsewhere Plutarch reports a similar view; and this became embedded in ancient Christian accounts of pagan philosophy, e.g., Lactantius *De Ira* 4.7. Thanks to Nathan Powers for the references. On ancient Epicurean theology, see Verde, this volume.

35. Cudworth 1678: 60.

36. Cudworth 1678: 64, 67–9.

37. Cudworth 1678: 146–74.

38. Cudworth 1678: Preface to the Reader.

39. Cudworth 1678: Preface to the Reader. Cudworth may be drawing on Cicero again here; see DF 1.19.

40. Cudworth 1678: 763. See also Cudworth 1996: 191.

41. *De Corpore* 26.3 (Hobbes 1839–45: 1.415–9).

42. Cudworth 1678: 462. Note the further explicit criticisms of Gassendi at Cudworth 1678: 697, 769.

43. There were a number of other, non-Epicurean forms of atomism, for instance those that ascribed forms to atoms.

Examples of non-mechanical atomists include Sebastien Basso, Etienne de Clave, and Daniel Sennert. For discussions of the varieties of early modern atomism, see Chalmers 2009, Clericuzio 2000, and Newman 2006. See also Johnson and Wilson 2008, which focuses on Lucretian atomism but carefully distinguishes it from other early modern forms.

44. Boyle 1999–2000: 13.227.

45. Du Châtelet 2009: 164.

46. We follow Boyle in using the term "corpuscularianism" to describe any view that explains the workings of nature in terms of the tiny particles that composed things, whether or not those particles are held to be genuinely indivisible (as in
p. 656 Gassendi and other atomists) or merely in practice stable (as in Descartes). Early modern authors often use terms like ↳ *principia* that can be applied equally either to genuine atoms or to tiny corpuscles whose indivisibility the author denies or remains neutral about.

47. None of these attempts contains anything like the swerve. Gassendi and Cudworth discussed and rejected the doctrine of the swerve; most later writers ignored it, or were simply not aware of it.

48. Another big issue is the nature of space. Is space independent of God? If so, doesn't that amount to the postulation of a second God? If not, what exactly is the relationship between space and God? Is space, for instance, a divine creation, a divine emanation, or—to use Newton's phrase—something like God's sensorium? Is space something outside the traditional ontological categories of substance and accident?

49. Gassendi 1964: 1.266b and 1.273b.

50. See LoLordo 2015.

51. Bernier 1992: 2.434. However, Charleton, Gassendi's main English popularizer, endorsed the claim that atoms are always in motion (Charleton 1654: 269).

52. Malebranche 1997: 448.

53. See Duncan 2016.

54. Boyle 1744: 3.451 ("Excellency and Grounds" §2: https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A28966.0001.001/1:12?rgn=div1;view=fulltext).

55. Clericuzio 2000: 106.

56. *Opticks*, Query 31 (Newton 1979: 400–1).

57. Leibniz 1989: 281.

58. Leibniz also refers to materialism about God, a position that Hobbes came to advocate in later works. See, for example, Hobbes 1839–45: 4.313. Useful recent discussions include Gorham 2013 and Springborg 2012.

59. Indeed we find Hobbes in *De Corpore* 26.3 arguing directly against the Epicurean arguments for a vacuum reported by Lucretius (Hobbes 1839–45: 1.415–9; Hobbes 2000: 284–6).

60. Compare the discussion of themes associated with atomism at Pasnau 2011: 91.

61. For a general introduction, see Thomson 2008: esp. 180–9. On La Mettrie and Epicureanism, see Comte-Sponville 1992, Thomson 2004, and Wolfe 2009.

62. La Mettrie 1996: 4–5.

63. La Mettrie 1996: 7. Locke uses the identity of a machine to provide a clue to the identity of living organisms (Locke 1975: 2.27.5).

64. La Mettrie 1996: 11–12.

65. La Mettrie 1996: 15. There seem not, however, to be many direct connections between Hobbes and La Mettrie (La Mettrie 1996: xxiii).

66. That self-identification was perhaps not always present. Thus, at one point in *L'homme machine*, La Mettrie hesitates, indeed declines, to adopt the approach of the Epicureans (as he calls them) who think the eye sees because of the organization it happens to have, not because of design (La Mettrie 1996: 25).

67. La Mettrie 1996: 39.

68. Thomson (2001) describes matter in La Mettrie as active. Certainly, it is the matter that is organized and active that he is interested in. But it is less clear that he is committed to all matter, at all scales, being active. Thomson (2001: 33) distinguishes two ways matter could be animated—fundamentally and as result of organization—and if the second view is La Mettrie's, as it might be, then he is allowing for inactive basic matter, even if he is not interested in talking about it.

p. 657 69. Cudworth 1678: 61.

70. On the corporeal God view, see note 57. On the negative theology, Hobbes's view that all we can know of God is that he exists and was the cause of the universe, see Duncan 2005 (though that tries perhaps too hard to find a non-ambiguous reading of the 1651 *Leviathan*, which seems in fact to be transitional and to point toward both views, though the negative theology tends to dominate).

71. Note E to the article "Paulicians" in his *Dictionary* (Bayle 1991: 169).

72. Bayle 1991: 169–70.

73. Bayle 1991: 167. See also Bayle's discussion of Epicurus's rejection of providence in the article "Epicurus" (Bayle 1734: 2: 774–92). This is not the place to engage in extended interpretation of Bayle, but it does seem possible to read Bayle as suggesting that if you use reason, there's a lot to be said for an Epicurean denial of providence.

74. Holbach 1876: 41.

75. Holbach 1876: 34.

76. Hume 2007a: 10.25.

77. Hume 1999: 187–98.

78. Loptson 2012: 760–1.

79. One could also see this as Hume adopting the same attitude that we suggested Bayle had (note 72), that if you rely on reasoning, there's a lot to be said for an Epicurean attitude to providence.

80. Lucretius 2001: 1.151–5. The causal-explanatory theme returns at Lucretius 2001: 5.1182–8.

81. *Leviathan* 12.6. See also *Leviathan* 11.26, Hobbes's summary of his account at *Leviathan* 12.11, and the role of fear in Hobbes's explanation of religious visions at *Leviathan* 2.7.

82. Curley agrees in a note to this passage in his edition (Hobbes 1994). Curley suggests also (following Tricaud) Statius, *Thebais* III.661. Malcolm in his edition (Hobbes 2012) refers to Statius, and to also to Petronius, Fragment 28, 1. I, though not to Lucretius. Meanwhile note that Hobbes used *De Rerum Natura* 2.54–7 as the epigraph of his *Historical Narration concerning Heresy* (Hobbes 1839–45: 4.385).

83. Cudworth criticizes this sort of explanation in Hobbes, when looking at arguments for atheism. Thus, he talks of the view that "the Attributes of God … had their only Original from a certain Rustick Astonishment of Mind, proceeding from excess of Fear, raising up the Phantasm of a Deity, as a Bug-bear for an Object to it self, and affrighting men into all manner of Confounded Non-sense (Cudworth 1678: 64) and of the view that God "is but the Creature of Mens Fear and Phancie, the Chief of all Phantastick Ghosts and Spectres, as it were an Oberon or Prince of Fayries and Phancies" (Cudworth 1678: 68). Later he connects Hobbes's account of the natural origin of religion to Lucretius's (Cudworth 1678: 656–7).

84. Cudworth 1678: 68.

85. Spinoza 2016: 66–7.

86. For Holbach, see Holbach 1876: 8 on the role of fear in the origin of religion. For Hume, see the related explanation of the

origins of polytheism (Hume 2007b: 3.1), and also his discussion of the move from polytheism to monotheism (Hume 2007b: 6.1–4).

87. For histories of this narrative, see Kuklick 1984 and Vanzo 2016.

88. See Anstey and Vanzo 2016.

89. This sort of narrative was not unknown in the period itself. Thus, as we saw in §5, Leibniz distinguished Epicureans and Stoics among seventeenth-century philosophers. He also, in the *New Essays*, compared the disagreement between himself and Locke to that between Plato and Aristotle (Leibniz 1996: 47).

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90. See most notably Popkin 2003, the first edition of which was published in 1960.

91. See, e.g., Hedley and Hutton 2008 for Platonism and Wilson 2008 for Epicureanism.

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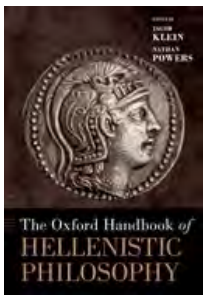
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CHAPTER

29 The Early Modern Legacy of the Stoics

John Sellars

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Abstract

This chapter examines the reception of Stoicism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from Justus Lipsius to Immanuel Kant. It considers topics often associated with Stoicism during the period, notably the inter-connected concepts of fate, necessity, and providence, as well as the rise and development of scholarship on Stoicism during the period. While this was an especially rich period for the reception of Stoicism (as can be seen in the work of Hobbes, Cudworth, Leibniz, and Bayle), more often than not the Stoics found themselves drawn into contemporary disputes, such as the potentially atheistic conclusions of Spinoza's philosophy. At the same time, this period saw a shift away from seeing Seneca as the pre-eminent Stoic and toward the systematic philosophy of Zeno and Chrysippus.

Keywords: Stoicism, Lipsius, Hobbes, Cudworth, Leibniz, Bayle, Spinoza, Diderot, Kant

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1. Renaissance Background

By the end of antiquity, more or less all the works of the Hellenistic Stoics were lost.[1] The subsequent reception of Stoic ideas was, thus, always second hand, either via reports and quotations from other ancient authors or via the works of the later Roman Stoics, especially Seneca and Epictetus. In the Latin West during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, knowledge of Stoicism came primarily from the works of Seneca and Cicero. The Renaissance saw the rediscovery of a wide variety of other texts that were rich sources of information about Stoicism, in many cases Greek texts brought to Italy from Byzantium. These included the *Vitae philosophorum* of Diogenes Laertius, brought to Italy in the 1420s and translated into Latin by Ambrogio Traversari in the 1430s, and the works of Sextus Empiricus, on which the humanist Francesco Filelfo drew.[2] The *Enchiridion* of Epictetus was also read and translated into Latin around this time, although its interpretation was mediated by the Neoplatonic commentary of Simplicius.

While discussions of Stoicism tended during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance to focus on ethical matters —virtue, indifferents, emotions—in the fifteenth century, Marsilio Ficino was one of the first to pay attention to Stoic physics and metaphysics, questioning the previously widely held assumption that Stoicism was broadly compatible with Christian teaching. Stoic materialism and pantheism could never, he argued, be reconciled with Christian doctrine. On the other side of the debate, the Aristotelian Pietro Pomponazzi defended aspects of Stoic physics against critics. In particular he argued in favor of Stoic determinism, both drawing on and responding to the *De fato* of Alexander of Aphrodisias.[3] In general, though, discussions of Stoicism during this period tended to focus on ethical topics and took Seneca as the primary point of reference. Indeed, Seneca attracted considerable attention into the sixteenth century from figures such as Desiderius Erasmus and Jean
p. 662 Calvin, as well as Justus Lipsius, to whom we shall ↳ return shortly. Michel de Montaigne also read Seneca, alongside Cicero, Plutarch, and other ancient authors, and these would all prove to be important sources for his *Essais*.[4]

2. Justus Lipsius

While Renaissance humanist discussions of a number of philosophical topics regularly referred to the Stoics, knowledge of Stoicism remained fairly superficial, especially beyond the realm of ethics. This started to change in the first decade of the seventeenth century, which saw a flurry of works that together formed the first serious attempt at a scholarly understanding of Stoicism. Paramount among these was a pair of handbooks written by Justus Lipsius and published in 1604: the *Manuductio ad Stoicam Philosophiam* and *Physiologia Stoicorum*.[5] Lipsius was already a committed Stoic, drawing on Stoic precepts in his own life.[6] Twenty years earlier, in 1584, he had published *De Constantia*, a broadly Stoic guide to coping with adversity that proved to be a bestseller, going through multiple editions and being quickly translated into all the major European vernacular languages.[7] Among many other works of classical scholarship, Lipsius prepared a substantial edition of Seneca's philosophical works, with introductions and commentaries, published in 1605; his two handbooks published the year before were presented as supplements to this edition of Seneca, providing readers of the great Roman Stoic with all the background information they might need about his professed philosophy. What Lipsius produced were the first serious studies of Stoicism as a philosophical system, in the form of doxographical sourcebooks drawing on the full range of ancient evidence available, embedded within his own interpretative commentary. They were reprinted a number of times during the seventeenth century, and they were to become the standard point of reference for discussions about Stoicism in the early modern period.[8]

Of the many aspects of Lipsius's account of Stoic philosophy, his discussion of fate was to prove both influential and controversial. In his earlier *De Constantia*, Lipsius had appeared to argue that the Stoic theory of fate was

problematic and must be modified. There, he distinguished between four types of fate: mathematical, natural, violent, and true. He identified the Stoic position with violent fate, which he defined as "the necessity of all things and actions which no force can break."[9] This he contrasted with true fate, defined as "an eternal decree of providence."[10] Lipsius went on to suggest that, in order to be acceptable, violent Stoic fate must be modified so that it does not subordinate God to fate, is not committed to an unalterable chain of events, admits miracles, and does not constrain the human will.[11] However, in his later *Physiologia Stoicorum* he defended the Stoic account of fate without modification.[12] It has been common to suggest that, via Lipsius, early modern thinkers often encountered a modified, Christianized version of Stoicism (so-called Neostoicism) that downplayed the
p. 663 deterministic implications of its materialism.[13] However, Lipsius's own view—on this topic at least—differed little from the ancient sources. Critics of Stoicism had charged it with subordinating divine ↳ providence to fate; one particularly problematic passage in Seneca appeared to subordinate God to fate, despite presenting God as the author of fate: "Although the great creator and ruler of the universe himself wrote the decrees of Fate, yet he follows them. He obeys forever, he decreed but once."[14] Yet doxographical sources for the early Stoa insisted on a straightforward identification of fate with providence.[15] In the *Physiologia*, Lipsius defended Seneca by saying that the Roman Stoic had simply expressed himself poorly. In this Lipsius followed Augustine's discussion of Stoic fate in *De civitate Dei*, which argued that the difference between the Stoic and Christian positions was merely one of verbal expression.[16] On this complex issue, the account that Lipsius passed on to early modern readers was unaltered Stoicism.[17]

In the same decade that Lipsius's two handbooks appeared, a number of other works devoted to Stoicism were also published. These included Adam Bursius's *Dialectica Ciceronis ... Maxime ex Stoicorum Sententia* (1604), a detailed study of Stoic logic and epistemology, Isaac Casaubon's edition of the Stoic poet Persius (1605)—with an extensive commentary touching on a wide range of points in Stoic doctrine—and *Elementa Philosophiae Stoicae Moralis* (1606) by Caspar Scioppius, who stressed the practical orientation of Stoicism and argued for its superiority over Aristotelian ethics.[18] Less scholarly but also influential was the *De Stoica Philosophia* (1612) by Daniel Heinsius.[19] Within just a few years, then, there suddenly existed an important body of scholarly and interpretative work on Stoicism based on the surviving doxographical evidence. However, as we shall see, the Roman Stoics Seneca and Epictetus would more often than not remain the principal reference points in philosophical debates involving the Stoics.

3. Seventeenth-Century France

This was especially so in France: René Descartes and Nicolas Malebranche focused their attentions on Seneca, while Pascal was more concerned with Epictetus, who was widely read in the wake of the work of Guillaume Du Vair, author of *Philosophie morale des Stoïques* (1585) and translator of the *Enchiridion* (1591).[20] In all three cases, ethical themes predominated. In the 1640s, Descartes discussed Seneca's *De vita beata* in his correspondence with Princess Elizabeth.[21] Although Descartes was sympathetic to the Stoics' claim that virtue is the highest good, he was less enamored of their rejection of pleasure. He found Zeno's account of virtue too severe and too detached from the body. Instead, he proposed a syncretic position bringing together Stoic, Epicurean, and Aristotelian ethics, claiming that all three schools were correct when it came to identifying the highest good. Despite this, Descartes's final view was strongly Stoic: "happiness consists solely in contentment of mind ... in order to achieve a contentment which is solid, we need to pursue virtue—that is to say, to maintain a firm and constant will to bring about everything we judge to be best."[22]

Malebranche was also reading Seneca, in particular the *De constantia sapientis*. In his *De la recherche de la verité*
p. 664 (1674–1678), he wrote that although he was impressed ↳ by Seneca's rhetoric, he was less convinced by his arguments.[23] Ironically, Seneca the Stoic incites the emotions but fails to engage one's reason, Malebranche argued. His main objection, though, was against the idealized image of the Stoic sage. Seneca's claim that such a person might exist, or that Cato the Younger may have even exceeded it, seemed fanciful to him. Turning

instead to Epicurus and, more importantly, to St. Paul, Malebranche argued that although a wise person might be able to bear great suffering, to claim that they will not even notice it is absurd. The Stoic image of the autonomous sage is arrogant and impious, Malebranche argued, and Seneca's account is all the more dangerous precisely because it is presented in a rhetorically powerful manner. Having said that, he also acknowledged that not everything Seneca said was wrong and that someone securely in possession of Christian truth might cautiously read him with profit.

Malebranche's final criticisms of Stoicism are curious and illustrate the limitations of taking one of Seneca's essays to stand for Stoic doctrine as a whole. In order to undermine the image of the completely autonomous sage untouched by adversity, Malebranche insists that "we are tied to our body, to our parents, to our friends, to our prince, to our country, by bonds we cannot break."[24] The soul, he continues, is intimately connected to the body and, via it, to the rest of the physical world. Human beings are naturally social, and this bond is unbreakable because "one is never above Nature."[25] Much of this the Stoics would have accepted and hardly taken to undermine their views. Malebranche's argument, then, was not with the details of Stoic doctrine—about which he probably knew fairly little—but instead with Seneca's overly rhetorical image of a completely autonomous individual. For Malebranche, such an image of autonomy was dangerous because it undermined the Christian idea of grace.

The topics of autonomy and grace also exercised Blaise Pascal, this time in connection with Epictetus. In a discussion with his spiritual director Isaac Le Maître de Sacy, Pascal praised Epictetus for many of his views, including his submission to God's will and his view that all things we receive are merely on loan and must at some point be returned without complaint.[26] However he was less impressed with what he called Epictetus's "wickedly proud" belief in human autonomy. Although he recognized that human powers come from God, Epictetus also thought that human freedom and happiness were completely within an individual's control.[27] He was ignorant of original sin and the need for divine grace. While there is much value in Epictetus, Pascal acknowledged, he must be read cautiously and under supervision.

4. Seventeenth-Century England

While in France Stoicism was often seen as a superficially attractive, but ultimately impious, philosophy, in England it gained a quite different reputation. There, the reception of Stoicism tended to focus on physical and metaphysical issues. In particular, Stoicism was closely associated with determinism. In a series of exchanges between Thomas Hobbes and John Bramhall, Hobbes found himself branded as a Stoic.[28] Bramhall ↳ described Hobbes as a proponent of "the grossest destiny of all others, that is, that of the Stoicks."[29] Bramhall identified this with the position outlined by Lipsius in *De Constantia*, a position that Lipsius called "true fate" and explicitly distanced from "violent" or "Stoic fate."[30] Yet, as claimed earlier, the distance between the two positions was not as great as Lipsius appeared to suggest, and Bramhall could see this. According to Bramhall, both Lipsius and Hobbes distanced themselves from the label "Stoic" while all the time remaining committed to the Stoics' extreme form of determinism. Bramhall repeatedly referred to Stoicism as the archetypal form of determinism: "A complete Stoick can neither pray, nor repent, nor serve God to any purpose. Either allow liberty, or destroy Church, as well as Commonwealth, Religion as well as Policy."[31] Stoicism was no longer an admirable if austere ethical position—as it had been in the Renaissance—but now a dangerously heterodox physical theory. In reply, Hobbes denied taking his doctrine from the Stoics, but felt no need to distance himself from them either. Their fault, so far as they had one, was not with their doctrine of fate, but "in feigning of a false God," namely Jupiter, instead of the one true God.[32]

p. 665

Another person to claim that Hobbes was indebted to the Stoics was the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth, who was also concerned about the determinism and potential atheism of the early Stoa.[33] His *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) included extensive discussion of Stoic doctrine, paying careful attention

to the ancient evidence and differences of views between individual Stoics. In his taxonomy of different forms of atheism, Cudworth identified four different types among ancient philosophers: atomical, hylopathian, hylozoick, and cosmo-plastick.[34] The last of these—"Cosmo-Plastick" or "Spermatick" atheism—he attributed to the Stoics. This type holds that there is a single living principle animating the natural world, and it is a form of atheism because this living principle is "without any sense or conscious understanding."[35] Cudworth justified this claim with reference to a passage from Seneca's *Naturales quaestiones*, which seemed to suggest that the world is alive in a manner akin to an animal or a plant.[36] But for Cudworth, atheism is always only a corruption of original theism, and he went on to argue that the earliest Stoics, and in particular Zeno, were indeed theists, albeit "ignorant, childish, and unskilful" ones.[37] The Stoic God, Cudworth argued, was originally conceived as a sentient, rational animal, but later Stoics corrupted this into the view that it was merely an unconscious principle at work in Nature. Seneca had equivocated over whether the Stoic God was an animal or a plant, but before him Boethus of Sidon had been more emphatic, denying that the cosmos is an animal.[38] Although Boethus was a relatively minor Stoic, known to be heterodox on a number of points in Stoic physics, Cudworth raised him up as an "eminent and famous Stoical Doctor," claiming that he had many followers among subsequent Stoics.[39]

Cudworth's discussions of Stoicism were in many respects the most important after Lipsius's. He carefully distinguished between the views of different ancient Stoics, and he was concerned not merely with the widely known ethical claims but primarily with Stoic physics and metaphysics. Along the way he was probably the first person to brand at least some Stoics as atheists, a topic to which we shall return in due course. But it is also
 worth noting that Cudworth's fellow Cambridge Platonist Henry More was an ↳ avid reader of Marcus Aurelius, admiring the moral maxims of the Roman Stoic without being unduly concerned about the metaphysical implications of the implicit, underpinning Stoic doctrine. Indeed, More was quite happy to take inspiration from Marcus's *Meditations* in his own *Enchiridion Ethicum* (1668) while remaining highly critical of central Stoic doctrines, such as the Stoic attitude toward the emotions.[40] More was presumably not the only person reading the *Meditations* in England at this point, especially in the wake of the important editions of the text prepared by Meric Casaubon (1643) and Thomas Gataker (1652). Casaubon had already translated the *Meditations* into English in 1634, while Gataker's substantial introduction and commentary sought to reconcile Marcus's Stoicism with Holy Scripture.[41]

5. Early Modern Germany

In Germany in the late seventeenth century, there was an expansion of scholarly work on Stoicism, most notably in the hands of Jakob Thomasius, author of *Exercitatio de Stoica Mundi Exustione* (1676), which was reprinted as *Dissertationes ad Stoicae Philosophiae* (1682). His work, which engaged with other ancient schools alongside Stoicism, was critical of what he took to be Lipsius's attempt to reconcile Stoicism with Christianity, his objection being that this undermined any attempt to produce an impartial history of philosophy.[42] Thomasius is probably best remembered now as one the teachers and correspondents of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Leibniz touched on Stoic material throughout his vast body of work, but one of the more sustained discussions of Stoicism can be found in his *Théodicée* (1710), the only book he published during his lifetime, and so consequently the work via which he was most widely known.[43]

In the *Théodicée*, Leibniz discussed the Stoics alongside numerous other philosophers on the topic of freedom and determinism. He suggested that the Stoics were "in favour of determinism and against necessity, although they have been accused of attaching necessity to everything."[44] He drew on Cicero's account in *De fato* of Chrysippus's compatibilist attempt to steer a middle course between freedom and necessity, and then, following the lead of Lipsius, turned to Aulus Gellius for a fuller account.[45] The latter reported Chrysippus's analogy between human action and a rolling cylinder: "if you roll a cylindrical stone over a sloping steep piece of ground, you do indeed furnish the beginning and cause of its rapid descent, yet soon it speeds onwards, not

because you make it do so, but because of its peculiar form and natural tendency to roll."[46] Similarly in the case of human action, external fate provides an external "push" but how a person responds depends upon their will and natural disposition. Leibniz challenged the objections against Chrysippus made by Cicero, Plutarch, and Leibniz's own contemporary Pierre Bayle, aligning himself with the Stoic position. Although he did not fully embrace Lispius's account, Leibniz defended Chrysippus, whose cylinder analogy he compared to his own image of a boat carried away down a river, "its pace becoming slower as the load grows heavier."[47] In these
p. 667 examples, the cylinder and the boat are not ↳ mere passive victims of a violent fate but instead actively contribute to the actions in which they are involved. Leibniz also agreed with the Stoa, responding to the traditional problem of evil, that sometimes a bad part of something may make the whole better.[48] He was clearly impressed by what he found in the early Stoa, noting that "if we were sufficiently informed concerning the opinions of ancient philosophers, we should find therein more reason than is supposed."[49]

6. Pierre Bayle

A good part of Leibniz's discussion of Stoicism in the *Théodicée* was, in effect, an extended response to Pierre Bayle. Bayle had written about Stoicism, and, in particular, had written a lengthy entry on Chrysippus in his *Dictionnaire*, which was first published in 1702.[50] In this work, he paid close attention to the doxographical evidence from sources such as Diogenes Laertius and Plutarch, and considered both ancient and modern criticisms. He noted that Plutarch accused Chrysippus of making God, the cause of all things, the author of sin, and he questioned whether Lipsius's attempt to defend him was successful.[51] As we have seen, Lipsius attempted to defend Chrysippus from the criticisms of Cicero by appealing the account of the cylinder analogy in Aulus Gellius. To this Bayle remarked that the distinction between internal and external causes employed in that analogy does not help here, for everything remains subject to the "unavoidable necessity of fate."[52] In the case of the cylinder, God is the author of both the external push that starts the cylinder moving and of the cylinder itself. Thus, Chrysippus must "ascribe to Fate all the crimes that Men commit," and Plutarch's objection stands.[53] Lipsius's solution to the problem was to suggest that the origin of evil was to be found not in God but in the imperfections of matter out of which things are made, but Bayle argued that this failed to address Plutarch's objection; indeed, Plutarch was explicit that matter was not, for the Stoics, the source of evil.[54] Moreover, given that Chrysippus defined God in a way that made it impossible to distinguish him from Nature, God must by definition be the author of everything that happens in Nature, including moral and physical evil.[55] Worse still, the Stoic God was both perishable and mutable, subject to periodic conflagration.

Despite having made these points, Bayle was far from quick to condemn either Chrysippus or the Stoics. He argued that Chrysippus wrote so much, and was so embroiled in arguments with Academic opponents, that it should not be surprising if he sometimes made mistakes or fell into contradiction. This is a common flaw of logicians, Bayle argued, who often fail to express themselves clearly in words.[56] Yet even that may be an unfair judgment, he noted, given that we do not have any complete works by Chrysippus to read in full.[57] Bayle also commented approvingly on Chrysippus's way of life, noting ancient biographical reports of his chastity and frugality.[58] He defended the Stoa as a whole by suggesting that, in any case, Chrysippus was by no means the
p. 668 principal representative of the school. He noted the sparse references to Chrysippus in the ↳ works of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, implying that the Stoics of antiquity did not hold him up as their authoritative spokesman.[59] In sum, Chrysippus the dialectician tied himself in knots when it came to questions concerning fate and necessity or God and Nature, but he was a morally exemplary figure. His failings were specific to him and ought not to be used to assess Stoicism as a whole.

Bayle was by no means, then, a hostile critic of the Stoics, even if he challenged them on the issue of fate. And although Leibniz defended the Stoics against Bayle's attack on that issue, on other topics he was himself critical, such as the ideal of patience in the face of necessity.[60] Leibniz also wrote a short essay about the revival of ancient forms of naturalism, namely Epicureanism and Stoicism.[61] In it he described the views of those he

called “the new Stoics,” suggesting that this new sect was “dangerous to piety” and arguing that, although sometimes expressed in different language, the position of these new Stoics was the same as that of a philosopher whose works had only just been published: Benedict de Spinoza. In this he was once again following Bayle who, in his entry on Spinoza, had identified a wide variety of historical precursors to Spinoza’s pantheism, including the Stoics.[62]

7. Spinoza

Spinoza is surely the most enigmatic figure in the seventeenth-century reception of Stoicism.[63] The similarities between his philosophical system and Stoicism have often been noted, yet Spinoza himself mentions the Stoics only a couple of times and always critically.[64] There is no concrete evidence to suggest a significant Stoic influence on the development of his philosophy, although, as many have noted, Stoic ideas were certainly in the air and readily accessible.[65] Spinoza echoed the Stoics in locating God within a unified Nature, conceiving humans as but parts of Nature driven by self-preservation, and advocating a thoroughgoing determinism while resisting fatalism. He also distinguished between good and bad emotions, advocating the elimination of the latter, and imagined an ideal wise person living a life guided by reason. Although he differed from the Stoics on issues such as teleology and providence, the similarities are nevertheless striking. Although Spinoza’s passing critical remarks about the Stoics suggest that he had some familiarity with their philosophy, a number of commentators have wondered just how Spinoza managed to develop a philosophical system that shared so much with Stoicism. One solution has been to suggest that Spinoza needed only to have shared a relatively small number of independently chosen “Stoic” premises for his system to develop along remarkably similar lines.[66]

Whether Spinoza himself was influenced by Stoicism or not, his own philosophy soon became closely associated with Stoicism in the minds of his early readers. Before long, Spinoza was dubbed a modern-day Stoic while the Stoics were labeled the Spinozists of antiquity. Drawing on the work of Thomasius, who had shown that the Stoic God was immanent in Nature, authors such as Bayle and, in particular, Johann Franz
p. 669 Buddeus made the connection between Stoicism and Spinozism.[67] In a pamphlet entitled *De ↳ Spinozismo ante Spinozam* (1706), based on a public debate that took place in 1701, Buddeus claimed that of all Greek philosophers the Stoics were the ones who came closest to Spinozism.[68] Given that he took Spinozism to be a form of atheism, this was not a good thing. His polemic was also printed in the same year in his *Analecta Historiae Philosophicae* (1706), which among other things also contained a number of pieces devoted to “De erroribus stoicorum,” based on a series of public debates that took place in the 1690s.[69] Buddeus’s claims about Stoicism drew on the judgments of Thomasius and Bayle, and, like so many others, Buddeus made use of Lipsius’s handbooks. He also wrote an extended essay on Stoicism published as an introduction to Marcus Aurelius, where he attacked Stoic theology once more but conceded that Stoic ethical maxims had some value so long as they were detached from the wider philosophical system.[70] Before long, Stoicism was regularly associated with both Spinozism and atheism, and this conjunction even became the subject of academic dissertations.[71] Suffice it to say that many of the claims made about Stoicism in this ongoing debate were more concerned with the dangers thought to attend Spinozism than they were with the impartial study of the Stoa.

8. Shaftesbury and Hutcheson

But not everyone who encountered Stoic ideas during this period automatically associated them with Spinozism or atheism. Readers of the Roman Stoics continued to focus their attention on the practical, ethical side of Stoicism. This is especially evident in the work of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. He wrote a series of ethical works that were gathered together and published as *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711). However, his interest in Stoicism only really becomes explicit when turning to a number of unpublished works. These include a short essay entitled *Pathologia*, which is a discussion and defense of the Stoic theory of emotions, and the *Askêmata*, a pair of notebooks based on his careful reading of the works of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius.[72] His notebooks, in large part modeled on Marcus's *Meditations*, were written to himself and intended as an aid to self-cultivation. As well as reflecting on a range of standard Stoic themes—virtue, the emotions, natural affection, Nature, providence—Shaftesbury embraced the idea of philosophy as an art of living that he found in Epictetus. Indeed, his notebooks are for the most part a patchwork of quotations from Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, supplemented with his own reflections. Shaftesbury's close attention to these texts is illustrated by the fact that he proposed a number of textual emendations that made it into the notes of John Upton's edition of Epictetus, published in 1739–41.[73]

Another British philosopher to take inspiration from the Roman Stoics was Francis Hutcheson, who, along with James Moor, translated Marcus's *Meditations* into English (1742). Hutcheson had been a keen reader of Shaftesbury and, like him, admired a variety of aspects of Stoic ethics, as well as the idea of philosophy as an art
p. 670 of self-cultivation.[74] In particular he shared with Shaftesbury an admiration for the Stoic idea ↳ of natural sociability, stressing the ultimate goal of *oikeiôsis* (community of humankind) rather than its point of departure (self-preservation). This, he thought, might lay the foundations for an attitude of "calm Benevolence" in place of "selfish Passions."[75] However, Hutcheson was by no means committed to the details of early Stoic ethics, and had objections to the Stoic account of the emotions as reported by Cicero.[76] It was Marcus's *Meditations* with which he felt the strongest affinity, in particular with its stress on a providential deity and the image of society as an organic unity of all humankind.

9. Brucker

Others, by contrast, continued the hard work of trying to reconstruct the views of the early Hellenistic Stoa. The culmination of the scholarly reception of Stoicism during the early modern period came in Jacob Brucker's monumental *Historia Critica Philosophiae*, first published in the 1740s and revised in the 1760s.[77] For Brucker, who had been a pupil of Buddeus, "the Stoics" were first and foremost the Stoics of the Athenian school: Zeno and his immediate disciples, Chrysippus, Panaetius, and Posidonius.[78] Indeed, Brucker explicitly warned against taking the Roman Stoics such as Seneca and Epictetus as adequate guides to comprehending Stoic philosophy. It is worth quoting him at length:

> Great care should be taken, in the first place, not to judge of the doctrine of the Stoics from words and sentiments, detached from the general system, but to consider them as they stand related to the whole train of premises and conclusions. For want of this caution, many moderns, dazzled by the splendid expressions which they have met with in the writings of Stoics concerning God, the soul, and other subjects, have imagined that they have discovered an invaluable treasure: whereas, if they had taken the pains to restore these brilliants to their proper places in the general mass, it would soon have appeared, that a great part of their value was imaginary.[79]

He went on to tackle the ever-controversial doctrine of fate. For Zeno and Chrysippus, fate is "an eternal and immutable series of causes and effects, within which all events are included, and to which the Deity himself is

subject."[80] Brucker contrasted this with the view of the Roman Stoics, who "changing the term Fate into The Providence of God, discoursed with great plausibility on this subject, but still in reality retained the ancient doctrine of universal fate."[81] Thus Brucker found himself still caught within the debate shaped by Lipsius at the beginning of the previous century. Where Brucker differed, though, was in claiming that Roman Stoic references to providence and a personalist God were deliberate attempts at dissimulation in the wake of Christianity:

> Any one who attentively examines the writings of the philosophers after the promulgation of the Christian doctrine, will perceive that the Stoics, in order to support the credit of their system, artfully accommodated their language, and even their tenets as far as they were able, to the Christian model.[82]

p. 671 While one might dispute a good number of Brucker's claims, his history would prove highly influential. It would become a standard work of reference and an important source of information for thinkers such as Denis Diderot and Immanuel Kant.

10. Diderot

Among the French *philosophes* it was Diderot who perhaps paid most attention to Stoicism.[83] He was the author of the article on Stoicism in the *Encyclopédie* and he also wrote at length about Seneca. His article in the *Encyclopédie*, it has been claimed, relied heavily on Brucker's account.[84] Like Buddeus, Diderot presented the Stoics as materialists and, ultimately, atheists, but of course this was no longer necessarily intended as a criticism.[85] He continued with his interest in Stoicism in his *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque le philosophe, sur ses écrits, et sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, first published in 1779 as a companion volume to a translation of Seneca's works into French, and re-issued independently in 1789.[86] Diderot's aim was to defend Seneca against the accusations of hypocrisy that he faced from many quarters, including from Diderot himself on a previous occasion.[87] It was, in part, intended as a response to Julien Offray de la Mettrie's *Anti-Seneque*, another production made to accompany a translation of Seneca, and published in 1748.[88] It was also a response to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's isolationist approach to the idea of living in harmony with Nature.[89] At the same time, Diderot was attempting to defend himself against charges of fraternizing with a despotic ruler, in his case Catherine the Great. The boundaries between Seneca, Diderot's image of an ideal Enlightenment *philosophe*, and Diderot himself were deliberately blurred. What Seneca offered was an image of an all too human philosopher, one who was actively engaged in the world, although not always living up to his professed ideals.[90] He championed virtue, not pleasure, and his regular references to God and providence chimed with Enlightenment deism. Having said that, the essay was primarily a defense of Seneca, not of Stoicism generally, and Diderot criticized Stoic doctrine on a number of points. He was especially dismissive of the Stoic account of emotions that Seneca had outlined in *De ira*, arguing that the emotions were essential, natural, and could have both positive as well as negative consequences.[91] Thus Diderot rejected those parts of Seneca's work that he disliked, while at the same time defending the man himself. Seneca was being disassociated from Stoicism.

11. Kant

Diderot was not the only person whose knowledge of Stoicism owed a debt to Brucker; Immanuel Kant also read the *Historia Critica Philosophiae* and it has been suggested that much of Kant's knowledge of ancient philosophy came from Brucker's history.[92] Indeed, Kant notes Brucker's criticisms of Plato in the *Kritik der*
p. 672 *reinen Vernunft* (1781).[93] ↳ However, his own philosophical engagement with Stoicism was in some respects far more old fashioned. It has been claimed, for instance, that his own ethics drew heavily on Cicero's *De officiis*,[94] leading to certain affinities between Stoic and Kantian ethics that have often been noted.[95] His lectures on ethics also show that he had a good grasp of Stoic ethics and its place within the wider history of ancient ethics.[96]

Like the Stoics, Kant placed the highest good inside the agent, in his case in the agent's good will. In his *Kritik der practischen Vernunft* (1788) he affirmed the Stoic view that external misfortunes ought never to be accounted evils.[97] Such things can never compromise one's virtue. However, he doubted the Stoic claim that happiness was, in effect, a natural concomitant of virtue.[98] Instead he insisted that virtue and happiness are heterogeneous, and one cannot be deduced from the other; consequently, the problem of reconciling morality with happiness remains. Thus, while Kant thought that Stoic ethics contained much in it to admire, he ultimately thought that it failed to deliver a completely convincing position.

A little later, in his *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (1797), Kant commented on the process by which people acquire virtue. There he followed the Stoics Musonius Rufus and Epictetus in saying that virtue is rarely acquired by concepts or principles alone, but also needs exercise or training.[99] In the following year, in his *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (1798), Kant described Stoicism as not merely a doctrine of virtue but also a science of medicine.[100] Unlike empirical medicine, which relies on drugs or surgery, Kant defined Stoicism as a philosophical medicine that can offer therapy for ills by the power of reason alone. The Ciceronian image of Stoic philosophy as an *animi medicina* had not been forgotten.

The period stretching from Lipsius to Kant was a high point in the recovery and reception of Stoicism, but it also involved some dramatic shifts in perception. As we have seen, the Stoics were repeatedly drawn into the philosophical disputes of the day and were read and reinterpreted in the light of those controversies. At the beginning of the period Stoicism was more often than not presented as an austere and noble ethical outlook, broadly compatible with Christian teaching. By the end, in the wake of both scholarly work reconstructing the views of the early Stoa and the impact of Spinoza's philosophy, it was clear that this was simply not the case. Both critics and admirers could now see that Seneca's endless references to God and providence could quite easily be replaced with a thoroughly naturalistic account of the world making reference only to Nature and fate. By the end of the early modern period, the Stoics had, in one sense, themselves become modern. Yet the older image of Stoicism as a practical ethic of self-cultivation did not go away either, and the works of the Roman Stoics continued to be read widely.

Further Reading

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Moreau, P.-F., ed. (1999) *Le stoïcisme au XVIe et au XVIIe siècle*. Paris: Albin Michel.
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Notes

1. This chapter focuses on the reception of Stoicism from c. 1600 to c. 1800. For an account of the reception of Stoicism in the immediately preceding period c. 1400 to c. 1600, see Sellars 2022. For a survey of the reception of Stoicism from Rome to the present day, see Sellars 2016a.

2. Filelfo is noteworthy for being one of the first people to focus his attention not on the Roman Stoics but instead on Zeno and Chrysippus, drawing on Sextus Empiricus, Diogenes Laertius, and Plutarch as sources. See further Sellars 2022.

3. On both Ficino and Pomponazzi, see Kraye 2016: 140–1 and Sellars 2022.

4. Subsequent discussions of Stoicism, especially in France, were often intertwined with the reception of Montaigne. This was especially the case with Nicolas Malebranche and Blaise Pascal.

5. See Lipsius 1604a and 1604b. For discussion, see Saunders 1955 and Lagrée 1994.

6. For an account of Lipsius's life, see Morford 1991.

7. See Lipsius 1584. By 1705, it had been printed 32 times (see Van Der Haeghen 1886: I, 73–138) and translated into Dutch, French, German, Spanish, Polish, Italian, and English (see Van Der Haeghen 1886: I, 139–75, who omits the Italian and English editions; these are noted in Van De Bilt 1946: 106–8).

8. After first publication in 1604, both works were reprinted in a smaller octavo edition in 1604, in 1610, and together in a pocket duodecimo edition in 1644 under the title *Philosophia & Physiologia Stoica* (Lipsius 1644). They were also reprinted in editions of Lipsius's *Opera Omnia*, in 1613, 1614, 1637, and 1675. For details, see Van Der Haeghen 1886: II, 553–62 and 215–61.

9. *De Constantia* 1.18, in Lipsius 1584: 57. This is, in fact, a direct quotation from Seneca, *QNat.* 2.36.

10. *De Constantia* 1.19, in Lipsius 1584: 60.

11. See *De Constantia* 1.20, in Lipsius 1584: 65.

12. Compare Lipsius 1584: 64–8 with Lipsius 1604b: 28–32. See further Sellars 2014. I argue there that in fact there is little difference between Lipsius's accounts of Stoic fate in the two works, and the headline claims in *De Constantia* that the Stoic position must be modified are in many ways misleading.

13. On Neostoicism in general, see Zanta 1914, Oestreich 1982, and Lagrée 2010.

14. See Seneca *Prov.* 5.8.

15. See, e.g., Calcidius *in Tim*. 144 (LS 54U).

16. See Augustine *De civitate Dei* 5.8 (*SVF* 2.932).

17. On this point I agree with Kraye 1988: 370 that "Neostoicism" ought to be understood not as a modified, Christianized version of Stoicism but rather as an attempt to show that conflicts between Stoic and Christian teaching "were more apparent than real." I discuss this issue further in Sellars 2014.

p. 674 18. See Bursius 1604 and Scioppius 1606. For a brief discussion of these works, see Sellars 2022. For a fuller discussion of Scioppius, see Kraye 2008.

19. This oration was first published in Heinsius 1612: 131–92, and reprinted many times. It was widely read and Heinsius was listed at the end of the article on Stoicism in the *Encyclopédie* (Diderot and d'Alembert 1765: XV, 533) as one of the four principal modern revivers of Stoicism, alongside Lipsius, Scioppius, and Thomas Gataker. On Heinsius, see Santinello 1993: 129–32.

20. For a fuller account of Stoicism in seventeenth century France, see Moriarty 2016 and also Brooke 2012: 76–100. Other figures in France who engaged with Stoicism during this period, both positively and critically, included Pierre Charron, Jean-François Senault, and Antoine Le Grand.

21. See Descartes 1897–1910: IV, 251–3, 263–8, 271–8. In what follows I focus on the letter to Elizabeth dated August 18, 1645, at 271–8.

22. Descartes 1897–1910: IV, 277.

23. See *De la recherche de la verité* Book 2, Part 3, chapter 4, in Malebranche 1674–78: I, 273–88, esp. 274.

24. Malebranche 1674–78: I, 286.

25. Malebranche 1674–78: I, 287.

26. The surviving text reporting the conversation, which took place in 1655, is not by Pascal himself and was first published in 1728. See Pascal 1954: 560–74.

27. See, e.g., Epictetus *Ench.* 1.1–4.

28. These exchanges were published in a series of works between 1654 and 1658. Hobbes wrote a final reply in 1668, which was not published until 1682, after his death. See further Macdonald and Hargreaves 1952: 37–40. In what follows I focus on Hobbes and Bramhall 1656. I have at some places updated the spelling, in line with the modernized version in Hobbes 1839–45.

29. Bramhall 1655: 141; also in Hobbes and Bramhall 1656: 195 (repr. in Hobbes 1839–45: V, 242). See also Bramhall 1655 where, in the opening "To the Reader," Hobbes's position is described as "sublimated Stoacisme."

30. Bramhall 1655: 142; also in Hobbes and Bramhall 1656: 195–6 (repr. in Hobbes 1839–45: V, 242–3). Compare with Lipsius 1584: 64–8.

31. Bramhall 1655: 118; also in Hobbes and Bramhall 1656: 150 (repr. in Hobbes 1839–45: V, 198).

32. Hobbes and Bramhall 1656: 197 (repr. in Hobbes 1839–45: V, 245). Hobbes cites *fatum est effatum Jovis*, which he takes from Bramhall's discussion in Bramhall 1655: 137. Interestingly Bramhall's argument there is not with the ancient Stoics but rather with what he calls "Stoicall Christians." Bramhall argues that in fact "the Stoicall and Christian destiny are one and the same."

33. For Cudworth's remarks about Hobbes, see Cudworth 1838: 73–6. Stoic themes in this work are discussed in Sellars 2012.

34. See Cudworth 1678: 131–3, with discussion in Sellars 2011.

35. Cudworth 1678: 131.

36. See Cudworth 1678: 131, citing Seneca *QNat.* 3.29.2.

37. Cudworth 1678: 136.

38. See Diogenes Laertius 7.143 (*SVF* 3. Boethus 6).

p. 675 39. Cudworth 1678: 133–4.

40. See More 1668. On More's reading of Marcus Aurelius, see Sellars 2017.

41. For full details of the editions by both Casaubon and Gataker, see Wickham Legg 1910: 37–8. For further discussion of the reception of Marcus in this period, including the work of Casaubon and Gataker, see Kraye 2012.

42. See the discussions in Santinello 1993: 409–42, esp. 428, and Brooke 2012: 137.

43. See Leibniz 1710, reprinted in Leibniz 1875–90: VI, 21–471. See esp. *Théodicée* §331–§336 (Leibniz 1710: 520–7; 1875–90: VI, 311–14). On Leibniz's relationship with Stoicism, see, e.g., Rutherford 2003 and Forman 2016.

44. *Théodicée* §331 (Leibniz 1710: 520; 1875–90: VI, 311).

45. See *Théodicée* §332 (Leibniz 1710: 522; 1875–90: VI, 312). Compare with Lipsius 1604b: 35–6, who pointed to Aulus Gellius *NA* "6.2," but in fact 7.2.7–10 (*SVF* 2.1000), as an important source to supplement to Cicero's *De fato*, which survives only incomplete. For discussion of this analogy, see Meyer, this volume.

46. Chrysippus, quoted in Aulus Gellius *NA* 7.2.11 (*SVF* 2.1000).

47. See *Théodicée* §335 (Leibniz 1710: 526; 1875–90: VI, 313–14).

48. See *Théodicée* §334 (Leibniz 1710: 524; 1875–90: VI, 313). Leibniz refers to Aulus Gellius *NA* "6.1" (i.e., 7.1.2–6 = *SVF* 2.1169) and Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1065d (*SVF* 2.1181).

49. *Théodicée* §335 (Leibniz 1710: 526; 1875–90: VI, 314).

50. Bayle's *Dictionaire historique et critique* went through a number of editions: it was first published in 1697, with a second edition in 1702, both appearing during Bayle's lifetime. Bayle's article on Chrysippus was not in the first edition of 1697 and first appeared in the second edition of 1702 (Bayle 1702: I, 921–31). Further editions of the *Dictionaire* were issued in 1715, 1720, 1730, 1734, 1738, and 1740, the last of which is the "fifth edition" (in fact, the eighth) and is often taken to be the best of the early editions. In this, the article on Chrysippus is at Bayle 1740: II, 166–75.

51. See Plutarch *Comm. not.* 1076b–f (parts in *SVF* 2.1168, 2.937). Bayle refers to another article ("Pauliciens") where he cites Plutarch's passage in full, at Bayle 1702: III, 2328–9. Bayle (1702: I, 926, note H) refers to Lipsius's *Physiologia Stoicorum* 1.14 (i.e., Lipsius 1604b: 35–9), the same passage discussed by Leibniz. Indeed, Leibniz, may have simply been taking his reference from Bayle.

52. See Bayle 1702: I, 926, note H.

53. ibid.

54. See Lipsius 1604b: 37, cited in Bayle 1702: I, 926, note H. For Plutarch's objection, see *Comm. not*. 1076c–d (*SVF* 2.1168): "For matter has not of itself brought forth what is evil, for matter is without quality and all the variations that it takes on it has got from that which moves and fashions it" (trans. Cherniss).

55. See Bayle 1702: I, 926.

56. See Bayle 1702: I, 928–9. Here Bayle refers to the judgment of Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Comp.* 4 (*SVF* 2.28) on the inelegance of Chrysippus and this being a typical fault of dialecticians.

57. See Bayle 1702: I, 930, note T.

58. See Bayle 1702: I, 927.

59. ibid.

p. 676 60. See *Théodicée* §217 (Leibniz 1710: 395–6; 1875–90: VI, 247–8) and 254 (Leibniz 1710: 435; 1875–90: VI, 267–8), with discussion in Rutherford 2003.

61. The essay, untitled, was written in French c. 1677–80, and can be found in Leibniz 1875–90: VII, 333–6.

62. See Bayle 1740: IV, 253, with Piaia and Santinello 2011: 120.

63. See the extended discussion in Miller 2015. Note also James 1993, Long 2003, and Miller 2016.

64. See his *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* §74 and *Ethica* V Praefatio, in Spinoza 1677: 380 and 233 respectively.

65. The record of Spinoza's library notes two copies of Seneca's *Epistulae* (one in translation) and a copy of Epictetus's *Enchiridion* (in fact, a copy of Simplicius's commentary); see further Miller 2015: 21. The only Stoic that Spinoza ever mentions is Seneca (see, e.g., *Ethica* IV Propositio XX Scholium, in Spinoza 1677: 180).

66. See, e.g., Long 2003: 15 and Miller 2016: 223.

67. See Thomasius 1676: 177–226.

68. See Buddeus 1706a: 22, reprinted in Buddeus 1706b: 340, which was itself reprinted in 1724. For more on Buddeus as a historian of philosophy, see Piaia and Santinello 2011: 343–73. For his role in the present debate, see Brooke 2012: 139–48.

69. See Buddeus 1706b: 87–203.

70. See Buddeus 1729, noted in Piaia and Santinello 2011: 348, who, later at 361, sum up his attitude: "Buddeus had initially been attracted by many statements made by Seneca and Marcus Aurelius into thinking, with Lipsius, that Stoicism could easily be assimilated to Christian truth. As he came to a deeper understanding of the system, he realised that it was none other than a form of Spinozism."

71. See, e.g., Burgmann 1721. On the Stoics as atheists, see Brooke 2012: 127–48.

72. Both of these works are preserved in the Public Records Office in Kew, London. For the *Pathologia*, see Maurer and Jaffro 2013 and its companion Jaffro, Maurer, and Petit 2013. The *Askêmata* were first published in 1900 and have been reedited in Ashley Cooper 2011. For discussion, see Sellars 2016b.

73. Full details for this and a wide range of other early modern editions and translations of Epictetus can be found in Oldfather 1927.

74. See further Maurer 2016, on both Hutcheson and the reception of Stoicism in the Scottish Enlightenment more widely.

75. See Hutcheson 1728: xvii.

76. See Maurer 2016: 260.

77. See Brucker 1766–67, which expands on the earlier edition by including a new sixth volume of additions and emendations. For an overview of his work, see Piaia and Santinello 2011: 479–577.

78. See Brucker 1766–67: I, 893–981.

79. Brucker 1766–67: I, 909. I quote from the (paraphrased) translation made by William Enfield 1791: I, 321.

80. Brucker 1766–67: I, 910 (Enfield 1791: I, 322).

81. Brucker 1766–67: I, 910 (Enfield 1791: I, 322).

82. Brucker 1766–67: I, 910 (Enfield 1791: I, 321–2).

83. For an overview of Stoicism in the French Enlightenment, see Andrew 2016.

84. See Piaia and Santinello 2011: 557 where it is suggested that the article on Stoicism in the *Encyclopédie* was "drawn almost entirely" from Brucker.

p. 677 85. See Diderot and d'Alembert 1751–65: XV, 528, where the Stoics are described as materialists, fatalists, and strictly speaking

atheists. Elsewhere in the *Encyclopédie*, in the lengthy article on Spinoza, Spinoza is presented as an atheist and then aligned with the Stoics (see Diderot and d'Alembert 1751–65: XV, 463).

86. I have consulted the first independent edition, Diderot 1789. A revised and expanded version was also published in 1782, under the title *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron, et sur les moeurs et les écrits de Sénèque*.

87. See Diderot 1745: 288–90, in a footnote to his translation of Shaftesbury.

88. See, e.g., Diderot 1789: 262–3. On both La Mettrie and Diderot, see Andrew 2016: 245–7.

89. On Rousseau's relationship with Stoicism, see, e.g., Roche 1974 and Brooke 2012: 181–202. On Diderot and Rousseau see Andrew 2016: 248–9.

90. See, e.g., Diderot 1789: 201.

91. See Diderot 1789: 332–3.

92. Piaia and Santinello 2011: 556 suggest that Kant "drew a large part of his knowledge of ancient philosophy from the *Historia critica*."

93. See Kant 1781: 316.

94. See Reich 1939 and DesJardins 1967. Kant read Cicero's *De officiis* in the German translation by Christian Garve, first published in 1783, and Garve's commentary on Cicero's account of Stoic duties may well have influenced the development of Kant's own theory of duty. See Doyle and Torralba 2016: 279–80.

95. See, e.g., Schneewind 1996. For further discussion and references, see Doyle and Torralba 2016.

96. See, for example, the notes on Kant's lectures on ethics from 1784–5 recorded by Georg Ludwig Collins, in Kant 1910: XXVII, 247–52.

97. See Kant 1788: 106 (Kant 1910: V, 60), silently drawing on an anecdote about Posidonius reported in Cicero, *Tusc*. 2.61.

98. See Kant 1788: 202 (Kant 1910: V, 112).

99. See Kant 1797: 163–4 (Kant 1910: VI, 477).

100. See Kant 1798: 172–3 (Kant 1910: VII, 100–1).

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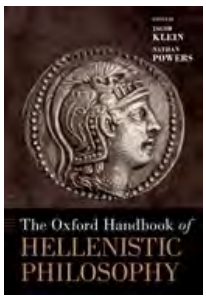
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CHAPTER

30 The Reception of Ancient Skepticism in Early Modern Europe

Anton M. Matytsin

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Abstract

This chapter examines the revival of ancient Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism in the early modern period and highlights the dramatic and varied effects it had on the learned culture of Europe. Thinkers appropriated the claims of both traditions, often combining arguments from each in ways that suited their intellectual projects. Some saw the skeptical critique of philosophical systems as an antidote to excessive dogmatism, while others deployed skeptical arguments tactically to refute their opponents; some saw in skepticism a way to defend religion from rationalist critiques (fideism), while others used it to challenge established religious and political authority. This chapter traces the adoption of skeptical stances and the deployment of skeptical arguments in some key figures of the period: Michel de Montaigne, Pierre Charron, François de La Mothe Le Vayer, Blaise Pascal, Pierre-Daniel Huet, Pierre Bayle, René Descartes, David Hume, Jean le Rond d'Alembert, and Denis Diderot.

Keywords: Academic skepticism, Pyrrhonian skepticism, early modern, dogmatism, fideism, religion, Montaigne, Charron, Le Vayer, Pascal

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1. Introduction

The revival of various forms of ancient skepticism had a deep and pervasive influence on early modern thought. The proposition that human beings could not apprehend the world with certainty, nor even (as Pyrrhonians argued) with reasonable probability, presented a profound challenge for all major early modern schools of philosophy. To varying degrees, skepticism was a preoccupation of most major philosophers between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, including René Descartes, John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant. Skeptical arguments also had significant lasting effects on a variety of related scholarly fields, including (for example) theology, ethics, natural philosophy, historiography, political theory, and jurisprudence.[1]

As Baron Reed has recently argued, the main differences between ancient and modern forms of skepticism are best understood with respect to "the changing circumstances in which modern skepticism developed."[2] The revival and spread of ancient skepticism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries coincided with a deeply turbulent period in European history: a time of intensifying religious debate during the Reformation, of growing philosophical uncertainty, of escalating warfare, and of contact with radically different societies in recently explored parts of the earth. Ancient skeptical arguments provided important "intellectual resources" for navigating the uncertainties of this new world, making skepticism an especially appealing perspective for a variety of thinkers.[3] The revival of Pyrrhonian skepticism during the Reformation meant that skeptical arguments would be deployed by both Catholics and Protestants in disputes about the interpretation of scripture. At the same time, skepticism also helped to make sense of changing political realities. The escalation
p. 682 of armed conflict, resulting from the political ↳ contests of the Reformation, led thinkers such as Montaigne, Locke, and Bayle to question the extent to which one could reasonably enforce religious uniformity and to issue increasingly forceful calls for religious toleration and the rights of individual conscience.[4] Others argued that political unrest resulted from vain attempts to use human reason in governing, and they echoed ancient Pyrrhonian skeptics in their call to respect established customs and traditions.[5] Philosophical skepticism thus ultimately helped to promote the cosmopolitanism and cultural tolerance that were important strains of Enlightenment thought.[6]

While this chapter does not provide a complete overview of the early modern engagements with ancient skeptical arguments, it outlines the reception and development of Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism in the work of key figures of the period. It especially explores the relationship between skepticism and religion among thinkers such as Michel de Montaigne, Pierre Charron, François de La Mothe Le Vayer, Blaise Pascal, Pierre-Daniel Huet, and Pierre Bayle, and it considers, within this context, the influential skepticism of René Descartes. Finally, it briefly examines the later influence of skeptical debates about doubt, certainty, and the powers and limits of human reason on Enlightenment thought, as reflected in the work of David Hume, Jean le Rond d'Alembert, and Denis Diderot.

2. Michel de Montaigne and Renaissance Skepticism

The skeptics of ancient Greece challenged their dogmatic opponents by arguing for one of two general claims: that no certain knowledge was attainable, or that there was insufficient reason to suppose that such knowledge was attainable.[7] The former view is generally associated with Academic skepticism—named after the Platonic Academy where it originated—while the latter is known as Pyrrhonian skepticism—named after Pyrrho of Elis.[8] Academic skeptics such as Arcesilaus and Carneades challenged the possibility of epistemic certainty.[9] Carneades nevertheless allowed that some appearances were more plausible or persuasive than others, and hence that some propositions might be entertained with a greater or lesser degree of probability.[10] Because they acknowledged degrees of plausibility in this way, Academics were the less radical branch of the two forms of skepticism, and their claims sometimes appeared in the works of thinkers who may not have accepted the more deeply skeptical outlook of Pyrrhonism. It was open to the Academics, moreover, to maintain that the skeptical thesis itself was among the propositions that appear more plausible than others.[11] The Pyrrhonians, by contrast, committed themselves to a more sweeping skeptical stance involving (on a widely accepted interpretation of Pyrrhonism) the wholesale suspension of judgment on every question. In the case of any proposition advanced for consideration, Pyrrhonians endeavored to show that the opposing appearances were
p. 683 equally plausible, hence that its ↳ negation was equally plausible. Accordingly, they insisted that no proposition could be grasped with any more assurance than any other—including the very claim that knowledge is impossible.[12]

Spearheaded by the work of Richard Popkin, much twentieth-century scholarship on the history of early modern skepticism has focused on the Pyrrhonian tradition, which made a dramatic return in the sixteenth century.[13] But although Pyrrhonian skepticism has received greater attention from historians of philosophy, recently scholars have, with justification, paid increasing attention to the Academic strain as well.[14] While the Pyrrhonian skepticism articulated in Sextus Empiricus's *Pyrrhonianae hypotyposes* (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*) was not rediscovered until the fifteenth century, the claims of Academic skepticism were already widely available in Cicero's *Academica* and Lactantius's *Divinae institutiones*. Augustine's *Contra academicos* also portrayed the Academics' arguments (in a negative light) and attempted to refute them.

Accordingly, the skepticism of both ancient schools was not entirely novel to medieval and Renaissance thinkers.[15] Following the publication of Latin editions of Sextus Empiricus's works, however, the tenets of Pyrrhonian skepticism began to take a deeper hold in Europe, especially in the intensifying debates of the Reformation. Sextus's *Pyrrhonianae hypotyposes* was published in 1562 by the Calvinist Henri Estienne (1528–1598), who claimed to have found a manuscript of the text in his library. Estienne claimed in his introduction that Sextus's skeptical arguments were an antidote to the impious conclusions that some philosophers were reaching by relying too heavily on the powers of reason.[16] In 1569, the Catholic theologian Gentian Hervet (1499–1584) played a key role in publishing a Latin edition of Sextus's *Adversus mathematicos*.[17] Hervet found a Greek manuscript of this text in the library of Charles, the Cardinal of Loraine, translated it into Latin, and wrote a brief preface, in which he argued that Sextus's propositions would expose the futility of Calvinist insistence that individuals could arrive at the true understanding of scripture without the aid of the Church's authority.[18] The appearance of these Latin editions made the arguments of Pyrrhonian skepticism more widely available to readers, and, partly due to the work of Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), familiarity with this ancient outlook began to spread across the learned culture of post-Reformation Europe.

Although Montaigne was not the first early modern thinker to encounter ancient philosophical skepticism and although he did not himself translate ancient skeptical texts, his *Essais* (1580) provided the most influential early articulation of ancient skeptical views. The *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*, which appeared in the second book, popularized a number of Pyrrhonian arguments and advocated a fideistic approach to Christianity.[19] Fideism was a movement within Christianity that emphasized the primacy of faith over reason in resolving theological difficulties. Although the term was coined in the nineteenth century, it was retrospectively applied

to early Church fathers such as Tertullian. Fideism became a popular theological position during the Reformation, when it presented an alternative to intense theological disputes and, in combination with philosophical skepticism, offered a refuge from dogmatic theological and philosophical claims.[20]

p. 684 Thus, Montaigne made his arguments about the weakness of the human understanding in the context of these Reformation debates about the proper methods of interpreting scripture. By emphasizing the limitations of reason, Montaigne, as a Catholic apologist, endeavored to demonstrate a need for the inspired authority of the Church to interpret the complexities of biblical passages. By showing the inadequacy of human understanding, he sought to undermine the Reformers' calls to arrive at the truth by the authority of scripture alone (*sola scriptura*).[21]

As Gianni Paganini has recently argued, however, Montaigne's popularization of Pyrrhonian skepticism was not used merely as an "an apologetic weapon" but also contained "its own original features," which "translated the entire Pyrrhonian technical terminology into a modern language and, what is more, redirected the ancient notions to suit modern needs."[22] One of the most significant dimensions of Montaigne's interpretation of ancient skepticism was his emphasis on the unreliability of the senses, which, depending on the sensory modalities of the individual person or animal, could provide vastly different information about the external world. All we could grasp, according to Montaigne's adaptations of Sextus Empiricus, were appearances of things, while their real nature remained forever inaccessible to the understanding. Montaigne thus formulated what Paganini calls a "phenomenalistic" theory of knowledge.[23]

In addition to popularizing a skeptical epistemology, Montaigne's *Essais* undermined a wide variety of contemporaneous views on different philosophical questions. In the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*, Montaigne summarized the diversity of incompatible and contradictory opinions about various subjects—such as the existence and the nature of God, the composition of the universe, the characteristics of the soul, and the question of animal intelligence, among others.[24] These discussions aimed to show the relativity and uncertainty of all philosophical speculations and to expose the uselessness of debating subjects that could not be decisively resolved. Montaigne contrasted the vain and futile attempts of philosophers to answer fundamental questions with the wise approach of the Pyrrhonians, who fully admitted their own ignorance.[25] He ultimately urged his readers to adopt a skeptical perspective and to suspend judgment on all philosophical questions.[26]

Montaigne's embrace of doubt extended also to moral precepts. His discussions of the variety of customs and traditions in the *Essais*, particularly in his essay "Des Cannibales," aimed to show that most human actions and beliefs were justified retrospectively, after instinctual habits had been formed without reflection. Rational considerations were thus not the primary motivating factors in people's distinctive behaviors but were provided as *post factum* explanations of them. Montaigne's analysis of the variety and idiosyncrasy of human customs thus undermined the idea that there were natural or universal moral laws and suggested that all ethical precepts were relative to time and place.

Montaigne's bestselling *Essais*, which came out in three different editions between 1580 and 1595, thus made the relatively esoteric philosophy of Pyrrhonism widely available and accessible.[27] Montaigne would continue to be the main source for the transmission of Pyrrhonism during the seventeenth century. He reformulated the
p. 685 Pyrrhonian ↳ outlook, both making its tenets applicable to the problems of modern philosophy and adapting it to the needs of confessional debates about the source and nature of religious truth. His Christian Pyrrhonism also provided a model for many seventeenth-century thinkers, who would marshal the skeptical philosophy in defense of Christianity against an array of rationalist critiques.

3. The Academic Skepticism of Pierre Charron and Francisco Sanchez

Montaigne's formulation of Christian Pyrrhonism found an important ally in his close friend Pierre Charron (1541–1603). First educated as a lawyer, Charron eventually became ordained as a Catholic priest. As a theologian, he made significant contributions to the project of fusing philosophical skepticism and Christian fideism in a culture of learning in which scholars actively competed to provide the most convincing demonstration of God's existence.[28] In *Les trois véritez* (1593), Charron argued against the Calvinists that reason could not furnish a "sufficient demonstration" of God's existence and nature because of humanity's "weakness and the greatness of God."[29] God was unknowable both because He was infinite and because humankind was incapable of certainty in any domain. One, therefore, had to rely on faith in the Christian revelation and in the Catholic Church's interpretation of scripture.[30]

Charron's important role in the interpretation and dissemination of skepticism has recently received greater attention.[31] According to Maia Neto, Charron's *De la Sagesse* (1601), the 1604 edition of which ended up on the *Index of Prohibited Books*, was "more diffused than Montaigne's *Essais*" during the 1600s, and it informed the way in which seventeenth-century philosophers such as Pierre Gassendi, René Descartes, and Blaise Pascal understood skepticism.[32] Scholars have also lately challenged the view that Charron was an unoriginal disciple of Montaigne, showing instead the important differences between his interpretations of skepticism and those found in the *Essais*. Paganini, for example, has pointed out the distinctly modern character of Charron's call for suspension of judgment, according to which "doubting requires a conscious and voluntary decision from the subject."[33]

While Montaigne favored Pyrrhonian skepticism, Charron appears to have been closer to the Academic tradition. For instance, he embraced Carneades's view that it was possible to distinguish degrees of probability or verisimilitude among impressions or appearances.[34] Thus, although Charron never identified himself as an Academic, scholars have tended to read him as embracing the Academic skeptical tradition rather than Pyrrhonism.[35]

Charron's interpretation of skepticism likely drew on the work of French humanist Omer Talon (1510–1562),
p. 686 whose commentary on Cicero's *Academica* (1547) ↳ offered a philosophical and historical account of ancient skepticism and advocated for a suspension of judgment on all questions. Talon himself marshaled Academic skepticism primarily to attack Aristotle and the Aristotelian scholastics, as he and the humanist Petrus Ramus (1512–1572) tried to reform the curriculum at the University of Paris in the mid-sixteenth century. In particular, Talon saw the Aristotelianism of the time as slavishly imitative, overly dogmatic, and ultimately dangerous to Christianity.[36] Talon made his skeptical attack on Aristotelianism just as Charron was completing his studies in Paris. In the midst of controversies over the curriculum, his influence likely informed Charron's own embrace of the Academic tradition.

The Portuguese-born doctor and philosopher Francisco Sanchez (1551–1623) was another important sixteenth-century skeptic. Like his distant cousin Montaigne, Sanchez was from a family of Iberian Jews who had converted to Christianity and eventually moved to southwestern France during the sixteenth century to escape religious persecution. Sanchez was educated at the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux, which the young Montaigne had also attended. He studied in Rome and at the University of Montpellier and later taught medicine and philosophy at the University of Toulouse. A year after the publication of the first edition of Montaigne's *Essais*, Sanchez published his own skeptical treatise titled *Quod nihil scitur* (*Why Nothing Can Be Known* – 1581).[37]

Sanchez began by declaring, "Not even this do I know, that I know nothing. I suspect, however, that neither I nor anyone else knows anything."[38] This proposition echoed the Pyrrhonians, who suspended judgment with respect to the skeptical thesis itself, arguing that the uncertainty of all knowledge was itself uncertain. Sanchez proceeded to criticize Aristotelian epistemology and logic, arguing that the scholastic understanding of these

subjects was based on abstractions and ill-defined terms. He also claimed that syllogistic demonstrations were merely linguistic constructs based on circular reasoning that could not provide knowledge of the external world. There is some debate among Sanchez's interpreters as to whether he was a Pyrrhonian or an Academic (or neo-Academic) skeptic. In his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697), the arch-skeptic Pierre Bayle declared Sanchez to be a "great Pyrrhonist."[39] Popkin has lately revised this view, suggesting that Sanchez's position is not that of Pyrrhonian skepticism "but rather the ... negative dogmatism of the Academics," which maintains that the skeptical thesis is itself rationally justified.[40] Elaine Limbrick, while agreeing that Sanchez was an Academic skeptic, has suggested that his methodological doubt aimed ultimately to "free the human mind of the fetters of the past and enable the skeptical enquirer to establish knowledge on a firmer empirical basis."[41]

In fact, to many philosophers who were beginning to rediscover ancient skeptical arguments, the distinctions between the Academic and Pyrrhonian traditions may have appeared more fluid and less rigid than a modern reader might assume. Like Sanchez and Montaigne, they might readily borrow particular ancient arguments and adopt specific positions from both traditions, without fully accepting the perspective of either school.

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4. Skepticism and the Critique of Aristotelian Scholasticism

The use of ancient skepticism to challenge dominant philosophical systems increased in the seventeenth century, especially as Aristotelianism came under more sustained attacks. Critics frequently deployed skeptical arguments tactically, in order to refute their opponents' views, rather than embracing the outlook of the Academic or Pyrrhonian tradition wholesale. Such tactical deployments of skepticism became especially common in natural philosophy during this period. Anti-Aristotelian philosophers made use of both Pyrrhonian and Academic arguments to weaken the scholastics' claims, while insisting, at the same time, that natural science should be placed on a probabilistic footing. Academic skepticism in particular offered a model for such probabilistic investigation, navigating between the extremes of dogmatism and Pyrrhonism.

In France, Marin Mersenne (1588–1648) and Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655) launched such skeptical attacks on the Aristotelian tradition and formulated alternative theories of natural philosophy. Both rejected the notion that nature could be known with absolute certainty, while also maintaining that one could acquire lesser forms of scientific knowledge. In 1625, Mersenne published *La vérité des sciences contre les sceptiques ou pyrrhoniens*, in which he attempted to defend natural philosophy against thoroughgoing skeptical claims. He argued that although the skeptics correctly showed the impossibility of knowing the real essences of things, they failed to recognize that limited knowledge of nature was possible on the basis of appearances.[42] Gassendi, a professor of mathematics at the Collège Royal in Paris, argued that although the senses could indeed prove faulty and unreliable, their errors could be corrected and their reliability increased.[43] His *De vita et moribus Epicuri* (*On the Life and Character of Epicurus* – 1647) and *Animadversiones in decimum librum Diogenis Laertii* (*Notes on the Tenth Book of Diogenes Laertius* – 1649) offered a Christian reinterpretation of Epicurean atomism, presenting it as an alternative to Aristotelian natural philosophy.[44] While Mersenne and Gassendi did not accept the outlook of Pyrrhonism, these so-called moderate or mitigated skeptics, as Popkin has labeled them, rejected both the dogmatic principles of the Aristotelians and of Descartes and his Cartesian disciples.[45] Notwithstanding their use of skeptical arguments for critical purposes, their ultimate aim was to construct new systems of natural philosophy that recognized the limitations of human understanding.

Although the revival of ancient skepticism was particularly notable in France, it was not the only place in post-Reformation Europe where Academic and Pyrrhonian traditions took root. Mitigated skepticism found allies in England among philosophers such as Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Joseph Glanvill (1638–1680), John Wilkins (1614–1672), and Robert Boyle (1627–1691). These thinkers advocated reforms in the study of natural philosophy and opposed the Aristotelianism that still dominated the universities.[46] Bacon's *New Organon* (1620) articulated a significant theoretical attack on the scholastics, repudiating them for producing barren knowledge of words

p. 688 rather than ↳ providing new information about the natural world that could improve the human condition. Glanvill, Wilkins, and Boyle were all members of the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge —whose motto "*nullius in verba*" (which can be translated as "take nobody's word for it") was inspired by Bacon's calls for reform—and rejected philosophical claims made on the basis of the presumptive authority of the past. Like their French counterparts Mersenne and Gassendi, these members of the Royal Society claimed to occupy a middle ground between thoroughgoing skepticism and dogmatism. They rejected Aristotelianism while endorsing the experimental method in all explorations of nature.[47] Their deployment of skepticism was thus primarily tactical and rhetorical, intended to undermine established intellectual authorities.[48]

The most notable and influential use of skepticism as an attack on received knowledge came from René Descartes (1596–1650). His *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (*Meditations on First Philosophy* – 1641) began with a systematic application of doubt to the foundations of all human knowledge. Descartes famously rejected the reliability of the senses and challenged the certainty of nearly all *a priori* claims, extending his doubt even to the point of questioning his own existence. Descartes then reasoned that even if he were completely deceived in everything else he had formerly believed, doubt itself required a doubting—and hence a thinking—self. Accordingly, even supposing that the elements of the external world, including his own body, were fictitious notions planted in his mind by a powerful deceiver, there must nevertheless exist a mind that was being misled. Therefore, Descartes concluded, thought and—consequently, a "thinking thing" (*res cogitans* or *chose pensante*)—had to exist.

On the basis of this new foundation, Descartes endeavored to establish the existence of God, of his own body, and of the external world. In the Sixth Meditation, he argued that if the information provided by his senses did not accurately represent the external causes of sensation, it must nevertheless be present in the mind through the causal agency of some entity or other. If this entity were God, he reasoned, God would be a deceiver, which is a metaphysical impossibility. Descartes therefore concluded that his representational sensations were indeed caused by external objects. He further concluded that even if those external objects did not correspond precisely to his representations of them, they must at least possess those properties that are clearly and distinctly understood by the mind.[49] This line of reasoning would become a very common argument used by anti-skeptical thinkers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as they tried to refute Pyrrhonian doubts about the uncertain correspondence between ideas and their objects.[50]

A number of Descartes's contemporaries saw his method of doubt not as a sincere formulation of skepticism but as an attempt to overcome the Pyrrhonian skeptics on their own terms. Some of Descartes's prominent disciples, like Pierre-Sylvain Régis (1632–1707), tried to dispel any notion that Descartes was a genuine skeptic, describing his as a provisional method for dispelling prejudices to arrive at more certain truths.[51] Contemporary scholars, most notably Popkin, have defended this interpretation, insisting that Descartes's engagement with doubt was a strategy used to defeat the skeptics at their own game.[52] Popkin nevertheless
p. 689 notes that the effects of Descartes's ↳ arguments advanced the Pyrrhonian cause, so that he became a skeptic "*malgré lui*."[53] Indeed, critics such as Jacobus Guilielmus Feverlinus (or Jacob Wilhelm Feuerlein, 1689–1766) chastised Descartes for causing the spread of atheism and skepticism by the inadequacy of his method. Others went still further, claiming that Cartesian doubt was an explicit profession of radical skepticism.[54]

While Descartes's ultimate intentions remain unclear, his use of the skeptical method certainly deepened and prolonged the skeptical crisis. While striking a decisive blow against the hold of Aristotelianism over philosophical education at European universities, Descartes's efforts also led to an intensified competition among different philosophical schools for primacy in the learned culture of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Together with both his disciples and his detractors, Descartes "opened the floodgates of philosophical uncertainty," and the ensuing flood continued well into the eighteenth century.[55]

5. Descartes's Critics: Simon Foucher and Pierre-Daniel Huet

While Cartesian principles offered formidable challenges to Aristotelianism in France and beyond, Descartes's critics employed skeptical arguments to undermine his own increasingly popular philosophical system and drew on ancient skepticism in the formulation of their rival positions. One prominent set of critiques of Cartesian rationalism came from the Dijonnais philosopher and theologian Simon Foucher (1644–1696), who wrote several works against Descartes and Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715).[56] In his *Critique de la recherche de la vérité* (1675), written in response to Malebranche's *Recherche de la vérité* (1674), Foucher launched an attack against Cartesian epistemology while also articulating his own skeptical philosophy. If Cartesian dualism is assumed, Foucher argued, then external objects, being material and extended, are too dissimilar to the immaterial, unextended mind to permit the sort of causal interaction required for the mind's perception of them. Since a likeness between matter and mind is essential to representation, Foucher concluded that, according to Descartes's own principles, neither the senses nor ideas can "give us knowledge of things that are outside us."[57]

Much like Mersenne and Gassendi, Foucher insisted that he himself occupied a middle ground between the extremes of Pyrrhonism and dogmatism, and he found this middle ground in Academic skepticism.[58] In particular, Foucher's *Dissertations sur la recherche de la vérité, contenant l'histoire et les principes de la philosophie des Académiciens*, first published in 1673, attempted to rehabilitate the Academic skeptical tradition.[59] The aim of Academic philosophy, according to Foucher, was to return philosophers to "first principles" by making them "undertake the necessary reflections to acquire [true and] certain knowledge."[60] He advocated a provisional
p. 690 suspension of judgment in all philosophical questions until the "evidence of the truth" (*évidence de la* ↳ *vérité*) led one to formulate a particular positive conclusion.[61] At the same time, Foucher insisted that the main goal of philosophy was not to abandon the search for the truth but to continue it by gradual and methodical steps.[62]

Cartesianism faced an even more prominent critic in Pierre-Daniel Huet, Bishop of Avranches (1630–1721), who, after flirting with Descartes's philosophy early in life, dedicated much of his scholarly career to refuting it.[63] His *Censura cartesianae philosophiae* (*Against Cartesian Philosophy* – 1689) in particular marshaled an array of skeptical arguments against Descartes's *Meditations*. Huet proceeded step by step to refute Descartes's view of ideas, his use of skeptical doubt, the *cogito* argument, and the proofs of God's existence. In each case, Huet tried to demonstrate what he saw as the inconsistencies and contradictions of Descartes's positive conclusions. He insisted that the Cartesian notions of clear and distinct ideas and of the natural light were inadequate criteria of truth, since appealing to them could not confer certainty (as Descartes had supposed).[64] Huet likewise rejected the possibility of formulating any adequate criteria of truth at all, noting that, "If every truth, whether known through itself or through something else, must be signified by a character of truth distinguishing it from falsity, this character itself is also a truth that bears its own character of truth, that is, another truth, and so on to infinity."[65]

Though Huet's anti-Cartesianism was widely known, only a small circle of friends were aware of his own commitment to philosophical skepticism during his lifetime.[66] But as the posthumous publication, in his own name, of Huet's *Traité philosophique de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain* revealed, his opposition to Descartes's positive claims was inextricably entangled with his own skeptical perspective. The *Traité* was originally written between 1690 and 1692 and first appeared under a pseudonym.[67] In Book I, Huet offered a series of proofs of the weakness of the human mind, drawing on arguments from both the Pyrrhonian and the Academic traditions. He referred to, among others, such issues as the physical nature of the mind that was affected by its varying physical states, the incomprehensibility of the inner essence of things, and the variability and imperfection of human perception. He also highlighted the absence of any criterion of truth, emphasizing the inadequacy of evidence, the circularity of proving the certainty of reason by reason, and the fallibility of all dogmatic opinions.[68] Book II elaborated these arguments, claimed that faith is needed to supplement reason, and urged philosophers to avoid adherence to any single school or sect, including that of the skeptics.[69]

Although Popkin originally described Huet as “a complete Pyrrhonian skeptic,” more recently scholars have suggested that Huet was more sympathetic to the Academic than the Pyrrhonian school.[70] Still others have noted that his “position was neither Academic skepticism nor Pyrrhonism, nor eclecticism *tout court*” and that he “chose not to label his philosophical convictions.”[71] However this may be, what united all of Huet’s projects was a quest to defend Christianity from rationalist critiques by removing the foundations of religion from the realm of philosophical speculation and locating them instead in the realm of faith.[72] Huet’s fideistic skepticism, which advocated the usefulness of skepticism in defense of religion, was consistent throughout his works. In
p. 691 the *Traité*, he insisted that the ultimate goal of suspending judgment on philosophical questions ↳ was to prepare “the mind for the reception of faith.”[73] Huet’s *Alnetanae quaestiones de concordia rationis et fidei* (*The Aulnay Questions on the Harmony between Reason and Faith* – 1690) likewise tried to reconcile his skepticism and his Catholic faith. There he described the dangerous consequences of a conflict between faith and reason, as a result of which the mind became divided and unsettled. Tranquility could be established only under the guidance of faith, while reason, being excessively ambitious and unaware of its limitations, inhibited the reception of divine truths.[74]

Huet thus proposed that faith and reason should operate within different domains: the former should deal with all religious issues, while the latter should function autonomously in questions of natural philosophy without infringing on matters of faith.[75] Huet especially opposed attempts to demonstrate theological truths philosophically, because such demonstrations—especially if they were inadequate—actually weakened religious belief rather than strengthened it. In the face of deist critiques of the scriptures and supernatural phenomena, the skeptics’ call to suspend judgment could help to set Christian miracles, mysteries, and doctrines that seemed to contradict rational explanations more appropriately on foundations of religious beliefs.[76] While demonstrating the weakness of human understanding, Huet insisted that the fundamental articles of Christianity should be accepted on faith alone.[77]

6. The Catholic Fideist Tradition: Pascal and La Mothe Le Vayer

Huet himself followed a long tradition of fideistic skeptics—a perspective inaugurated by Montaigne (see § 2) and continued by Pierre Charron, François La Mothe Le Vayer (1588–1672), and Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) well into the 1600s. Although Pascal was not generally numbered among the main expositors of either Pyrrhonian or Academic skepticism, his fideism and his objections to abstract philosophy and to Cartesianism in particular make him an important figure for understanding later thinkers like Huet. His posthumously published *Pensées* (1670) explicitly denounced all metaphysical demonstrations of the existence of God as unconvincing, making “little impact” and yielding only a “speculative knowledge of God.”[78] Pascal claimed that reason’s “last step” was to recognize that there are “an infinite number of things that surpass it” and lie beyond its reach.[79] Pascal’s critique of rational approaches to religion would resonate with many contemporaries, and Huet himself heavily annotated his own edition of the *Pensées*, engaging with Pascal’s interpretation of the relationship between faith and reason and suggesting that “it us up to faith to make reason submit.”[80]

The humanist François La Mothe Le Vayer, who served as tutor to the younger brother of Louis XIV, presents another curious case of Christian skepticism. His works articulate a consistent expression of philosophical skepticism that led him, at least on the surface, to embrace fideist conclusions. In the *Opuscule, ou Petit traité*
p. 692 *sceptique sur cette* ↳ *façon de parler, N’avoir pas le Sens Commun* (1646), he openly questioned the possibility of grasping natural truths with certainty, citing the fallibility of the senses and the absence of any criteria of truth as major reasons for the irreparable weakness of human reason.[81] In the *Soliloques sceptiques* (1670), La Mothe Le Vayer went so far as to deny that human beings were rational animals, claiming instead that “man” was an “animal desiring knowledge” but never able to attain it.[82]

According to some interpretations and his own explicit claims, La Mothe Le Vayer seems to have held these positions for reasons similar to Huet's. By demonstrating the weakness of reason, he argued, Pyrrhonism would encourage humankind to cease to engage in futile philosophical debates by showing that all of knowledge was "nothing but a collection of opinions contested by those who have time to examine them in depth."[83] La Mothe Le Vayer saw philosophical schools as fashionable systems that became popular due to their novelty, not because they offered better understandings of the surrounding world. Like Huet, he insisted that skepticism proved useful in that it revealed the feebleness of reason and unreliability of the senses and pointed to Christian revelation as the only source of true and certain knowledge: "skepticism is of no little use to a Christian soul, because it makes the soul surrender all those magisterial opinions that St. Paul so strongly detests."[84] Comparing the "soul of a Christian skeptic" to "a field cleared and purged of bad plants," La Mothe Le Vayer contended that suspension of judgment on philosophical questions allowed people to attain a more perfect belief in the essential tenets of Christianity.[85] A skeptic's mind would not hold opinions contrary to religious truth, and the soul would have no choice but to turn to faith in revelation for certainty and peace.

La Mothe Le Vayer was (and remains) a controversial thinker. As Popkin has pointed out, he has been dubbed both "the Christian sceptic" and the "epicurean unbeliever," and disagreements about the sincerity of his fideism persist to this day.[86] Challenging Popkin's and Maia Neto's readings of La Mothe Le Vayer as a Christian Pyrrhonist, Sylvia Giocanti insists that his skepticism "clearly differs from that of Montaigne" in that it ultimately leads "to libertinage" by "the adoption of a rebellious attitude toward the common way, and hence toward the authority of tradition." She insists that his fideism was dissimulated and his "claims of obedience to Christianity do not actually have any credibility," as his version of skepticism implicitly "leads to irreligion."[87]

7. Skepticism and Irreligion

The interpretation of La Mothe Le Vayer as a libertine skeptic who sought to undermine tradition would make him a central figure in the circle of the so-called *libertins érudits*. Among these seventeenth-century freethinkers were Guy Patin (1601–1672), the rector of the school of medicine at the University of Paris; Isaac de La Peyrère (1596–1676), the author of the controversial pre-Adamite theory; and Samuel de Sorbière (1615–
p. 693 1670), translator and editor of Hobbes's and Gassendi's works.[88] Many of these humanist ↳ scholars actively denounced witchcraft persecutions along with other superstitious practices. Their detractors, on the other hand, accused them of engaging in scandalous practices themselves, and of violating the existing moral and religious orders.[89]

Though the reputation of the *libertins érudits* for debauchery was likely exaggerated by critics, the association of skepticism with irreligion is certainly not without foundation. Some thinkers of the period did indeed use skeptical arguments to undermine belief in the authenticity of scripture and its divine authorship.[90] For example, Isaac de La Peyrère's controversial *Prae-Adamitae* (1655) drew on historical sources from ancient Egypt, Babylon, and Greece and on new accounts of voyages in Asia and the Americas to show that the history of the world began well before the beginning of the timeline recorded by scripture, and accordingly, that the Bible's primeval history was a record of the Jews alone, excluding the rest of humankind.[91] Thomas Hobbes's (1588–1679) *Leviathan* (1651), Baruch Spinoza's (1632–1677) *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670), and Richard Simon's (1638–1712) *Histoire critique du vieux testament* (1678) similarly challenged the authority of the Bible, criticizing traditional belief in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and suggesting, instead, that the text had been written over several generations. While such skepticism was not necessarily new to biblical scholars, these thinkers "changed the nature and the import of the discussion" and created "a radical new scepticism about religious knowledge."[92] Spinoza's arguments in particular stood in opposition to claims of fideists like Huet and Pascal. He subjected religious beliefs to skepticism while remaining a rationalist in philosophical questions, and he used examples of inconsistencies in scripture to establish its inherent historicity and refute its divine authorship.[93]

Such works strengthened the association of skepticism with irreligion in the eighteenth century. The further appearance of defenses of deism, such as John Toland's (1670–1722) *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) and of explicitly atheist works, such as the *Treatise of the Three Impostors*, heightened anxieties about threats to established religious authorities.[94] Religious apologists saw skepticism—which they increasingly called Pyrrhonism—as the first step toward irreligion and libertinism because it weakened respect for authority and tradition, prompting people to doubt the most obvious philosophical and theological truths. These apologists warned of the menace that skepticism posed to the political and social order.[95]

8. The Pierre Bayle Controversy

Few thinkers are more important to understanding the complexities and ambiguities of early modern skepticism than Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), a Huguenot exile living in Rotterdam; controversy over the correct interpretation of Bayle persists to this day. Modern interpreters have variously identified him as a Pyrrhonian skeptic, a rationalist, an atheist, a deist, a fideist, a libertine, and a progenitor of the Enlightenment.[96] Many of
p. 694 these scholarly interpretations have in fact reproduced seventeenth-century reactions ↳ to Bayle.[97] Admirers in his own day saw him as a champion of erudition, of religious toleration, peace, and free expression, while critics described his works as poisonous vessels of radical skepticism, atheism, and libertinism calculated to contaminate minds and subvert the existing order.[98] This "double image" of Bayle—in Jonathan Israel's terms—helps to explain why he has been read in so many diverse ways.[99] Moreover, as John Christian Laursen has observed, Bayle "wrote so much and returned to every issue multiple times and from different angles, that there is some justification, somewhere in his writings, for almost every possible interpretation."[100]

Whatever Bayle's own religious beliefs and philosophical views may have been, eighteenth-century readers—whether pious or freethinking—saw his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* as a repository of subversive thought. Ernst Cassirer dubbed it the "arsenal of the Enlightenment."[101] The *Dictionnaire* was the most widely owned text in French private libraries in the eighteenth century, and it offered an erudite collection of articles that marshaled a wide array of argumentative perspectives to cast doubt on religious and philosophical matters.[102]

Some of the articles contained in the *Dictionnaire* indeed questioned the rational foundations of revealed religion, showing that human reason was unable to resolve some of the most important theological questions. Bayle's entries on the Manicheans and the Paulicians, for example, underscored the problem of evil and explained the difficulty of reconciling divine omnipotence with God's benevolence. According to Bayle, one reason theologians faced difficulties in refuting the Manichean conception of evil as a principle powerfully opposed to good is that this conception in fact presented the most rational solution to the problem of evil. In the same vein, Bayle criticized those who claim that "God has permitted sin in order to manifest his wisdom," likening this conception of God to that of "a father who allows his children to break their legs so that he can show everyone his great skill in mending their broken bones."[103] The same article raised problems for the traditional theological claim "that God permitted sin because he could not have prevented it without destroying free will."[104]

Bayle pointed not only to the weakness of human reason in matters of theology, however, but also to the contradictions inherent in natural philosophy and metaphysics. In the article "Pyrrho," he insisted that it was not possible to maintain—as Galileo Galilei and John Locke had done—that primary qualities such as dimension, motion, and size existed in the objects of our perception, while secondary qualities, such as color and taste, existed only in the mind. Both types of qualities were present only to the mind, one of the interlocutors in the article observed, and their independent objective existence could not be guaranteed. The article "Zeno of Elea" similarly raised skeptical worries about the existence of the void, about infinite divisibility, and about motion. In his summary of Zeno's paradoxes of motion and arguments for the impossibility of extension, Bayle claimed that these difficulties could not be resolved philosophically. After

criticizing every definition of extended substance, Bayle endorsed Zeno's own conclusion, claiming that it was "evident that the existence of this extension is impossible," hence that existed "only in the mind."[105] The speculations of natural philosophy, Bayle concluded, merely led one to recognize the "incomprehensibility of all things."[106]

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9. Enlightenment Skepticism and Anti-Skepticism: David Hume and the *Encyclopédistes*

Bayle's skeptical *Dictionnaire* quickly became a bestseller and cast a long shadow over eighteenth-century learned culture. Its arguments posed further problems for those trying to answer the challenge of skepticism and offered support to those questioning received theological and philosophical assumptions. Foremost among the latter was Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776), whom Popkin once characterized as the "only living skeptic" in the middle of the eighteenth century.[107] Recent research suggests that philosophical skepticism was far more prevalent in the eighteenth century than Popkin originally claimed, yet Hume remains a central figure in understanding how Enlightenment thinkers grappled with the challenges it posed.[108]

It is clear that Hume himself was familiar with both ancient and early modern skeptics—including Sextus Empiricus, Foucher, Huet, and Bayle—and that he drew on these sources to construct the devastating attack on the powers of human reason set out in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740) and *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748).[109] There, Hume argued that our seemingly commonsense notions of substance, causation, and the self had no secure rational foundations. He insisted that human behaviors were based instead on "Instinct or mechanical Power, that acts in us unknown to ourselves, and in its chief operations; is not directed by any such Relations or Comparisons of Ideas, as are the proper Objects of our intellectual Faculties."[110] Hume similarly reasoned that notions of virtue and morality were based on "public Utility," which he saw as "the *sole* Origin of Justice," and that "reflections on the beneficial consequences of this virtue are the sole foundation of its merit."[111]

In advancing these arguments, Hume explicitly distinguished between the varieties of ancient skepticism on which he drew. He noted, in particular, that "*mitigated* Scepticism or *academical* Philosophy which may be both durable and useful" was "a necessary Preparative to the Study of Philosophy."[112] Pyrrhonism or absolute skepticism, on the other hand, attempted to "destroy reason by argument and ratiocination."[113] Hume agreed that Pyrrhonian skeptics advanced insurmountable objections against "abstract reasonings" and threw reason into "Amazement and Suspense."[114]

But Hume also offered a novel reply to the skeptical challenge. However much Pyrrhonian arguments triumphed at the level of abstract reasoning, "Action, and Employment, and the Occupations of common Life" were collectively the "great Subverter of *Pyrrhonism* or excessive Principles of Scepticism."[115] However philosophically potent skeptical arguments might be, "[a] Pyrrhonian cannot expect, that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind" and "must acknowledge … that all human life must perish were his principles universally and steadily to prevail."[116]

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Popkin has argued that this response to the challenge of radical Pyrrhonism, which rests on a distinction between theory and practice, constitutes "one of Hume's greatest achievements."[117] And indeed it resembles the approach taken by other Enlightenment thinkers, such as editors of the highly influential *Encyclopédie*. Jean le Rond d'Alembert's (1717–1783) "Discours préliminaire" (1751) and many of Denis Diderot's (1713–1784) articles tried to formulate a theory of knowledge that took into account skeptical claims about the fallibility of the senses and the weakness of human reason. They denounced the *esprit de système* and encouraged independent empirical investigations.[118] Like Hume, d'Alembert and Diderot advocated for a mitigated and reasonable

skepticism in philosophical matters while also insisting that doubts should be abandoned in daily life and in practical matters.[119]

10. Conclusion

The revival of Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism had dramatic implications for the learned culture of early modern Europe. Thinkers appropriated the claims of both traditions, frequently combining arguments in ways that suited their intellectual projects. Consequently, early modern skepticism appeared in variegated forms and was embraced by a broad philosophical and theological spectrum of thinkers. Some saw its critique of philosophical systems as an antidote to excessive dogmatism, while others deployed its arguments tactically in order to refute their opponents. Some saw skepticism's challenges to the ambitions of reason as a way to defend religion from rationalist critiques, while others perceived in its arguments useful methods for challenging established religious and political authorities. The recovery and appropriation of ancient skeptical thought prompted a deep and lasting reassessment of the scope and limits of human reason, profoundly shaping modern understandings of the possibility and character of knowledge.

Notes

1. For recent scholarship on the influence of skepticism in these fields, see Laursen and Paganini 2015; Matytsin 2015: 243–59; Kors 2019: 183–91; Mulsow and Laursen 2019: 69–87.
2. Reed 2018: 275.
3. Reed 2018: 273.
4. Laursen 1998: 197–215; Levine 1999a: 1–19; Levine 1999b: 51–75; Tarcov 1999: 179–95; Weinstein 1999: 197–223; Laursen 2011: 131–44.
5. E.g., Sextus Empiricus, *PH* I.24.
6. Pagden 2013: xi–xii, 7–8.
7. Popkin 2003: xvii.
8. Bett, this volume, Allen, this volume, and Schwab, this volume.
9. Caston, this volume.
10. p. 697 Allen, this volume and Bett, this volume. Note that this reading is itself controversial (e.g., Brittain).
11. Sextus Empiricus himself criticizes the Academics on this point, lumping them with the dogmatists for their confidence that nothing can be known.
12. Caluori 2018: 261. As an interpretation of ancient Pyrrhonism, however, this reading is controversial; see Schwab, this volume.
13. As Popkin once noted, "the skeptical crisis of the Renaissance and the Reformation … is more aptly described as a *crise pyrrhonienne* than a *crise academicienne*" (Popkin 2003: xx).
14. Thus, Charles B. Schmitt has demonstrated the influence of Cicero's *Academica* on medieval and Renaissance philosophy, while, more recently, José R. Maia Neto, Plínio Junqueira Smith, and Sébastien Charles have shown the great importance of Academic skepticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For more on Academic skepticism, see Schmitt 1972; Maia Neto 1997; Bett 2010; Maia Neto 2014; Smith and Charles 2017.
15. The arguments of the Academic tradition were directly available to readers through several Latin sources (Floridi 2002:

13–25). Prior to the rediscovery of Sextus, Pyrrhonian arguments were known to Renaissance thinkers through the Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, which provides an outline account of Pyrrho's life and thought (Barnes 1992: 4241–57). Greek manuscripts of Diogenes Laertius were available to Italian humanists like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, his nephew Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, and Girolamo Savonarola (Floridi 2002: 27–35 and Popkin 2003: 19–23).

16. Floridi 2002: 72–7 and Popkin 2003: 36.

17. Sextus Empiricus 1569. See also Machuca 2018: 169–70.

18. Floridi 2002: 85–7 and Popkin 2003: 36–8.

19. Montaigne 1727, vol. 2: 210–596. For more on Montaigne's *Apologie*, see Vincent 2001: 132–63; Popkin 2003: 47–8; Maia Neto 2004: 13–42; Paganini 2008: 15–60.

20. For more on fideism and fideistic skepticism, see Penelhum 1983a: 18–61; Penelhum 1983b: 287–318; Popkin 2003: 47–52; Somos 2016: 425; Matytsin 2016: 25–32, 94–109.

21. Moreau 2001: 386.

22. Paganini 2018a: 236.

23. Paganini 2018a: 238–9.

24. Montaigne 1727, vol. 2: 229–357, 387–422.

25. Montaigne 1727, vol. 2: 422–23.

26. Paganini 2018a: 240. Paganini suggests that unlike the ancient skeptics, who called for a suspension of judgment that ended in *ataraxia*, Montaigne "ends up making doubt … the climax of the skeptical approach," which produced "a state of restlessness and discomfort rather than of calm moderations of emotions."

27. Popkin 2003: 44–57 and Paganini 2018a: 234–6.

28. Kors 1991: 77.

29. Charron 1595: 17. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

30. For more on Charron, see Charron 1961; Horowitz 1971: 443–57; Gregory 2000: 113–56; Popkin 2003: 57–61; Maia Neto 2014: 11–40; Paganini 2018b: 247–59.

31. Maia Neto 2014: 1–6.

32. Maia Neto 2014: 2. Maia Neto cites Desan's biography of Montaigne, according to which Charron's text counted 44 editions between 1601 and 1672. See Desan 2009: 5–6.

33. Paganini 2018b: 249. See also Popkin 1954 and Paganini 1991: 26–30; Neto 2014: 27–8.

34. Cicero had translated Carneades's term *pithanos* ("persuasive") as *probabile* or *verisimile*.

35. Maia Neto 2014: 13–18, 38–40; Bahr 2017: 45–63; Paganini 2018b: 253–4.

p. 698 36. Popkin 2003: 31–2.

37. Popkin 2003: 38–9 and Caluori 2018: 260.

38. Quoted in Caluori 2018: 261.

39. Bayle 1740, vol. 4: 133–4.

40. Popkin 2003: 41.

41. Limbrick 1988: 78, 88 (quotation). Damian Caluori suggests that Sanchez embraced a "methodical skepticism" according

to which he believed knowledge to be “achievable” but never “definitely achieved” (Caluori 2018: 261–3).

42. Mersenne 1625: 13–14.

43. Gassendi 1658, vol. 1: 79–80.

44. For more on Gassendi’s skepticism, see Brett 1908; Rochot 1950: 67–79; Bloch 1971; Popkin 2003: 120–7; Fisher 2005; Fisher 2014; Maia Neto 2014: 45–65; Bellis 2017: 125–52; LoLordo 2018: 295–305. (For his appropriation of ancient Epicureanism, see LoLordo and Duncan, this volume)

45. Popkin 2003: 113–14.

46. For a seminal work on certainty and skepticism in the English context, see Shapiro 1983.

47. See, for example, Boyle 1661; Wilkins 1704: 1–11; Glanvill 1676.

48. For more on Academic Skepticism at the Royal Society, see Hill 2017: 103–24.

49. Descartes 1647: 98–9.

50. Matytsin 2016: 102–3.

51. Régis 1691: 3. See also Borghero 2001: 394.

52. Popkin 2003: 151.

53. Popkin 2003: 158–73. For alternative explanations of Cartesian doubt, see Maia Neto 2014: 97–124; Davies, 2017: 153–80; Cunning 2018: 306–19.

54. Historian of philosophy Carlo Borghero, for instance, has argued that in denying the testimony of the senses, stressing the uncertainty of mathematics, and advancing the hypothesis of the deceiving God, Descartes’s hyperbolic doubt went far beyond the skeptical arguments of his day (Borghero 2001: 398).

55. Matytsin and Burson 2019: 13.

56. For more on Foucher, see Rabbe 1867; Popkin 1957: 16–20; Watson 1966; Watson and Grene 1995: 4–11; Lennon 2003: 117–28; Maia Neto 2003: 71–95; Popkin 2003: 274–7; Charles 2013a: 76–85; Boudreault and Charles 2017: 245–58; Hickson 2018: 328–40; Hickson 2019: 678–90.

57. Foucher 1675: 45–6.

58. Foucher 1693: 3–4. No known copies of the 1673 edition exist.

59. Boudreault and Charles 2017: 246–51.

60. Foucher 1693: 71.

61. Foucher 1693: 137.

62. Foucher 1693: 93.

63. Huet 1810, vol. 1: 29–30. For more on Huet’s life, see Bartholmèss 1850; Tolmer 1949; Shelford 2007.

64. Huet 2003: 121–7.

65. Huet 2003: 116.

66. For more on Huet’s *Traité*, see Malbreil 1994: 169–82; Popkin 2003: 277–82; Rapetti 2003; Lennon 2005a: 65–75; Lennon 2005b: 63–79; Matytsin 2016: 94–109; Hickson 2018: 321–8; Rapetti 2019: 45–68; Maia Neto 2022: 59–101.

p. 699 67. Lennon 2005a: 66–7. For a detailed account of the composition of this text see Maia Neto 2022: 59–101.

68. Huet 1723: 11–22, 32–94.

69. Huet 1723: 176–224.

70. Popkin 1980: 21 (quotation); Popkin 2003: 280. For interpretations of Huet as an Academic skeptic, see Lennon 2005a: 65–75; Maia Neto 2008: 221; Charles 2017: 259–73; Hickson 2018: 323–6; Maia Neto 2022: 2–3 and 50–54;

71. Rapetti 2019: 68.

72. As Rapetti has recently argued on the basis of new manuscript evidence, the skeptical *Traité* "was originally designed to serve as a the foundation of Huet's entire system of thought" and helped him "find a compromise between his philosophy and his faith" (Rapetti 2019: 51, 68).

73. Huet 1723: 209.

74. Huet 1690: 5.

75. Huet 1690: 61, 74–5.

76. Kors 1993: 185–6; 202–4.

77. For an alternative interpretation of Huet, see Maia Neto 2008: 209–22.

78. Pascal 1670: 153.

79. Pascal 1670: 47.

80. Huet's marginal note on Pascal: 1670, 48. Huet's edition of the *Pensées* is at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France: Rés. D 21375. Huet's marginal notes on the *Penséés* are also published in Francis: 1959. For more commentary, see Maia Neto and Popkin 1995: 147–60; Matytsin 2016: 32.

81. La Mothe Le Vayer 1646: 8–10.

82. La Mothe Le Vayer 1670: 17–18.

83. La Mothe Le Vayer 1656a: 74–6 (quotation on 76).

84. La Mothe Le Vayer 1647: 224–5.

85. La Mothe Le Vayer 1656b: 309.

86. Popkin 2003: 82. Compare further Paganini 1997: 7–31; Giocanti 1997: 32–48; Giocanti 2002: 31–42; Popkin 2003: 82–7; Maia Neto 2014: 67–93; Giocanti 2018: 283–94.

87. Giocanti 2018: 286–7.

88. Popkin 2003: 80–2.

89. For more on the *libertins érudits*, see Pintard 1943; Charles-Daubert 1998; Moreau 2007; Maia Neto 2022: 7–16.

90. Popkin 1993a: 1–11.

91. Popkin 1987: 42–59.

92. Popkin 1993a: 6.

93. Popkin 2003: 239.

94. For more on the *Treatise of the Three Impostors* and skepticism, see Berti 1993: 216–29.

95. Matytsin 2016: 1–8, 37–51.

96. Dibon 1959; Labrousse 1963; Labrousse 1964; Rex 1965; Whelan 1989; Bots 1998; Mori 1999; Lennon 1999; Israel 2001: 337–41; Popkin 2003: 281, 300–1; McKenna and Paganini 2004; Paganini 2004: 510–20; Israel 2006: 63–93, 278, 669–71;

Laursen 2018: 355–66; Matytsin 2020. For overviews of the recent interpretations, see Shank 2011: 1–14; Matytsin 2016: 52–4; Van der Lugt 2016: 3–8.

97. For more on the reception of Bayle in the eighteenth century, see Rétat 1971; Matytsin 2016: 54–93.

p. 700 98. For more on the metaphor of skepticism as a disease of the mind, see Paganini 2010: 191–206; Matytsin 2012: 66–79; Matytsin 2016: 37–51.

99. Israel 2008: 131–51.

100. Laursen 2018: 355.

101. Cassirer 1951: 167.

102. Labrousse 1987: 7–8.

103. Bayle 1740, vol. 3: 627.

104. Bayle 1740, vol. 3: 627.

105. Bayle 1740, vol. 4: 540.

106. Bayle 1740, vol. 4: 545. For more on Bayle's discussions of natural philosophy, see Matytsin 2016: 188–96 and Matytsin 2020: 307–10.

107. Popkin 1980: 58. Popkin later modified this assessment.

108. See, for example, Popkin, Olaso, and Tonelli 1997; Maia Neto, Paganini, and Laursen 2009; Charles and Smith 2013; Charles 2013b: 1–15; Laursen and Paganini 2015; Matytsin 2016; Burson and Matytsin 2019; Brandão 2019: 109–28.

109. Perinetti 2018: 48, 53–70. For other accounts of Hume's sources, see Popkin, 1993b: 137–41; Olshewsky 1991: 269–87. For an interpretation of influence of these sources, see Fosl 2019: 16–108. For Hume's influence, see Jones 2005.

110. Hume 1748: 170.

111. Hume 1751: 33.

112. Hume 1748: 249, 233.

113. Hume 1748: 241.

114. Hume 1748: 243.

115. Hume 1748: 246.

116. Hume 1748: 248.

117. Popkin 1952: 65.

118. Alembert 1751: ii–iv, xxvi–xxxi.

119. Matytsin 2019: 161–82.

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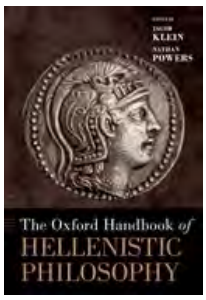
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